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WEDDING



ISLA MAY MULLINS

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ANNE'S WEDDING

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ISLA MAY MULLINS



The Blossom Shop, net \$1.00

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THE PAGE COMPANY
53 Beacon Street, Boston, Mass.



Anne Carter

ANNE'S WEDDING

A BLOSSOM SHOP ROMANCE

BY
ISLA MAY MULLINS

AUTHOR OF
"THE BLOSSOM SHOP," "ANNE OF THE
BLOSSOM SHOP," ETC.

WITH A FRONTISPIECE IN FULL COLOR BY
GENE PRESSLER



THE PAGE COMPANY
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TO
The Highland Mothers' Club
Louisville, Ky.
WHOSE EARNEST WORK HAS WON
MY ADMIRATION

2137298

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ANNE'S WEDDING

CHAPTER I

AN ANNOUNCEMENT PARTY

“**W**EDDING finery, girls! Wedding finery!” cried Anne Carter, tripping up the front steps with a lightness that told of supple, much-used muscles in her tall, well-rounded figure, and with sparkling eyes that proclaimed unmistakably sudden climax in womanly happiness. Her sisters, May and Gene, “May’n’gene” as she had come to call the “two inseparables,” girls of nineteen and twenty, sprang at once from the step where they sat talking

and cried, "Stop, Anne, and tell us about it!"

The radiant girl fluttered aloft a letter bearing English stamping and addressed in a bold, even hand-writing which the other girls had no trouble in identifying, while the dancing feet paused long enough for her to turn and cry again:

"Wedding finery! I must get at it! I have never let myself think about it even, for fear it would just run away with me, and I would forget to eat,—then vanish into thin air before the time really came!" And a playfully tragic shadow dominated the sparkling gray-blue eyes for an instant, but only to release them again to the high lights of joy. "Oh, girls, hurry, we must begin this minute! Where's mother?"

She flew on then through the broad hallway with all the impetuosity of a

child of ten, this young maiden of twenty-two with a gleaming ring on the engagement finger and matronly dreams swaying her thoughts full four years! For Anne Carter and Donald Thornton had really loved each other since she was fifteen and he seventeen, but it had taken them several years to find it out, which was all the better for both, and then there had been four years more during which Donald had been working his way up in his father's business, an international one, including England and America in its activities.

"I don't want father to have to support me, don't you know, when I marry," he had said to Anne. "Of course the home is waiting for us, and father longing to have you there, but—well, when I set up an establishment, even if father is there, I don't want him to meet the bills."

And so Anne had waited patiently till Donald had made good in the business world and was able to do his part in maintaining the ancestral home of his English mother, with titled antecedents, in adequate style and dignity. This had been much more easily and quickly accomplished because all the youth's training had been with reference to the business he was to assume. This training had included two years in a little Alabama town at a college near his American grandparents, for his father had been of the South and he wished the boy to know and love it. There was the strongest bond between the two, and love and loyalty to his father had spurred the young man on to rapid grasp of the business almost as urgently as the sweet call across the water from the Southern girl to whom he had plighted his faith. Now word

had come from him that a date *must* be set as early as possible for the marriage.

Anne found "Mother" without difficulty, for this tale belongs to a period when mothers were always easily found. Her serene face, full of the home repose of two decades ago, bent above a bit of sewing in her own room and was instantly lifted, smiling and ready at Anne's step. One revealing glance between the two, and throwing her lithe figure at mother's feet, like the little girl of years before, Anne hid the beaming face in her lap and handed up the letter for mother to read. Somehow there were no words for her message now, and there had never been any secrets between this daughter-of-the-heart and mother-instead who had lived under the same roof as members of what had come to be playfully known as "The Blossom Shop Family." It was in a

sense a composite family, but the varying elements were so homogeneous that the pretty title fitted admirably. Mr. Carter, a widower with two girls nine and eleven, Anne and May, had married Mrs. Grey, a widow with one small girl, Gene, of eight, who had, just before the marriage, been healed by skillful surgeons of congenital blindness. Mrs. Grey and little Gene, named Eugene for her father, had supported themselves for years before on Mrs. Grey's old home place next door to the Carters by packing and sending to Northern markets flowers from their ample garden, and they had then first termed the old home The Blossom Shop. The place was finally devastated by fire, and an accident to an old trunk as their household things were hurriedly moved, had revealed a lost will which restored to Gene the fortune denied her father, and

brought her into contact with the unknown Northern relatives of her father, to whom she and her mother became greatly attached, in spite of strong previous prejudice on both sides. Then the marriage followed which united mother and child with their dearest friends, the Carters.

Anne's letter from Donald was at last read by mother and daughter together, the young cheek pressed close against the older one, and it revealed the fact that some "jolly good things" had come along unexpectedly in the business, and made immediate plans possible for Donald, and wouldn't Anne please hurry those mysterious preparations brides seem to have to make and set a day in early spring? It was then just at the close of the Christmas holiday time, a brief space in which to prepare a young Southern girl, who

thought little about fashions, to present herself in the midst of an old English family and claim a place among them. No wonder she had fluttered bewilderingly when the long-looked-for moment really came, and it was only the mother-in-law who could have so quickly turned her thought into orderly, though still joyful lines. The entire trousseau was not planned on the spot, as was first threatened, but there was a going-over of many things between the two, which was a profitable and very precious preliminary.

The holiday time meant that May was at home from a mid-West university, where she was taking a course in modern language, for this great university's stamping and finishing of the thorough schooling which she had taken in the home college; Gene Carter Grey (the

Carter had been inserted when the families combined), her inseparable companion, had not gone with her, for she was taking a year of rest before entering a New England college, that her education might be topped off, she would have said, in the native land of her fore-fathers. Dr. Murton—Uncle Doctor, as the girls had come to call him—and his wife, Gene's Aunt Martha, were there as they always were for Christmas, and last but not least, in some respects, was Murton Grey Carter, the young son of the house, a sturdy boy—some eight years old. He could make more noise than all the rest put together, he would have said himself, and he certainly was not to be left out in any reckoning. So there was a big family council possible, and Anne at once decided there must be tea at the Blossom Shop.

This material Blossom Shop, which had been built on the site of Mrs. Carter's old home, was a picturesque, low building of East Indian architecture, whose sloping roof dropped from its high apex in deep, graceful curves to cover generously the broad veranda all around its sides, with an upward tilt of the roof again at the quaint pillars. Within there was a wide fireplace for chilly days, the broad chimney on the inner wall being highly ornamental. The rafters were exposed, the walls were ceiled with beautiful Southern pine and the deep window-ledge were filled with growing, indoor plants, while Marechal Neil roses covered the exterior with riotous bloom and fragrance. The whole family, including Uncle Doctor and Aunt Martha, had given great interest and study to the planning of the building, intended as a play-

house for the growing children, with tennis court and croquet grounds in the rear, and the result was a beautiful and artistic building within and without, which they all loved. It was always the place for joyful events, especially surprise revelations, so when May and Gene plied Anne again with questions, she only put a finger to her lips and gayly announced: "Tea in the Blossom Shop, girls," which might mean anything delightful and mysterious.

Then she went next for Mammy Sue, the old colored nurse who had been mother to her and May for a number of years before their father had married Mrs. Grey, and engaged her to come and wait upon the table at tea instead of the young colored maid who usually performed that service.

"It's for something very special, Mammy Sue," cried the girl with delightful in-

sinuation, and Mammy Sue was more flattered to be wanted there than had she been bidden to a feast with the highest of the land.

“Bring Uncle Sam, too,” Anne called back, as she started away from the cabin to the house again. “He can pour the water,” she added, knowing that he must have some part in it. Uncle Sam, an old servant of Mrs. Carter, was Mammy Sue’s husband of late years, and the two were devoted to all the children of the combined families. Their light, their joy, all they knew of earthly hope and expectation was bound up in “dem chil-lun.”

As Mr. Carter came in from business—tall, somewhat commanding, with the reserve of the older fatherhood upon him—he, too, was met by Anne with “Tea in The Blossom Shop, father!” But eyes

which would not cease their sparkle, though lips were very demure, made the father search his daughter's face keenly, while his heart gave a quick, startled throb. The thought of Anne's going so far away to make her home was an ever present regret. He asked no question at the end, but she—with quick responsive tears for something in his face—threw her arms about his neck. That was all between the two, but it had told the news, and volumes besides.

With a blazing log on the hearth, lighting up the ceiled walls, exposed arching rafters, beautifully carved interior chimney and growing window plants and vines, the simplest tea in the Blossom Shop was always a pretty affair, and this time the table was made gay with quickly improvised favors: little rolls of Christmas green tissue, ribbon-tied in white,

each with a clear label marked "Secret."

"Well," said Uncle Doctor, "who can eat with a secret hanging fire like that?" And he set an example which the rest immediately followed, by opening his roll at once, to find a small, dainty card upon which was written in Anne's clear hand: "You are cordially invited to attend the wedding of Anne Carter and Donald Thornton on May first, 18—"

Really the Murtons, including Murton Grey, were the only ones to be greatly surprised, though Anne's father looked up with a gentle objecting shake of the head over the early date set.

Murton Grey said promptly with boyish indignation, "Who says so? I don't believe it. Is it true, mother?"

"Well, son," she smiled back with determined cheer, "I don't think any of us are quite prepared to believe it, but a

letter that came this afternoon said some very decisive things."

"Anne shan't go away across the ocean to live, if she does get married! I'm going to run off with her myself before Donald comes for her," said Murton Grey, in bragging, childish futility against the inevitable.

Everybody laughed, and Anne said, "Oh, I'll tell you what will happen, Murton Grey, I'm going to pack you in one of my trunks and run off with *you*!"

A very pleasing prospect that—Murton Grey would like nothing better than such a lark, and in his imagination holes were already in the top of the trunk for him to breathe through—but he looked up at mother, and then at father, and his bright face was uncertain; then at Anne again—and he did want to be with her always.

There was a special bond between him

and Anne; she had saved his life, somehow, he had in mind, though she always said with a shadow in her eyes, "No, I almost lost it for you by leaving you in your carriage to run down hill into the creek. It was Donald's big dog Rex that saved you."

Just how that was, did not matter much, but Murton Grey knew that Anne had always loved him in a way she did no one else. He did not dream, however, that she had whispered to herself over him, many and many a time, "My first baby!"—vaguely knowing that through him she came into womanhood after a terrible travail of anguish and remorse for heedless neglect when he had been left to her care, and only a merciful providence prevented his rolling down the wooded slope back of their home into the swift-running creek after spring rains.

Uncle Doctor had a special tie with Anne, too, on account of her badness as a child, both agreed; in accordance with the theory that like attracts like, the doctor always added. He sat now looking earnestly at the girl, as though he could not or would not believe that she was so soon to be married and leave them; while Mammy Sue, waiting on the table in a freshly starched dress and white apron and spotless head handkerchief, crumpled suddenly so she could hardly stand, and Uncle Sam, moving around feebly, but proudly, to pour the water, shook his head mournfully.

Aunt Martha, quick to see that the little announcement party was in a fair way to fall into gloom, came to the rescue by exclaiming, "Another Blossom Shop wedding! It is eight years since ours took place here!" And the doctor, reminded

of that happy event, the crowning one in his life after years of fruitless longing for Miss Martha Grey, the seemingly unattainable New England spinster, put selfishness out of the way and made merry in a fashion of which he only was capable.

When supper was over, Anne went to the kitchen and told the news of her coming marriage to the housemaid and the cook, and the cook's daughter, Cahaba, a colored girl who had grown up with the girls and whom Aunt Martha had educated in a Southern college for colored girls. She was now teaching in the town, but was always at the Carters to help in any way she could, out of school hours. Anne knew they were all very interested to hear what had been going on in the Blossom Shop, and she could not deny them the pleasure of sharing her glad expectations. So she told them all, and the

hilarity with which it was received here fully made up for any lack of enthusiasm from the family.

“Oh, Miss Anne, is you really going to be married?”

“An’ go ’way off ’cross the ocean?” added another.

“I tell you dat’s fine! I bet der won’t be anudder girl in dis town what does dat!” This last was from the cook, who had no idea what going across the ocean meant, but it was something few folks did that she ever heard about, and, of course, it was something grand!

Cahaba did not speak, but her eyes, like big black beads, danced with the inspiration of a sudden hope. She was of the genuine negro type, black as a coal, but slender of figure, alert, resourceful and with a remarkable gift for mimicry. When Anne left she followed into the

hall and whispered, "Let me go 'long as lady's maid!"

"Sure enough," returned Anne, stopping, "but what about the teaching?"

"I'll learn more, and teach better, some day," said Cahaba, promptly.

"We'll see," laughed Anne, as she went on, and, thinking it over as she went, she decided that it would be fine, sure enough. Cahaba was so sensible and so genteel and really refined with her schooling—but it was not a matter that held her thought just then with any seriousness. Next day, Saturday, she was in the pantry a moment hunting a tea-cake—an old girlish habit—the pantry had an open window on the rear porch, and she heard Cahaba's voice in eloquent discourse to somebody. Peeping out she saw it was the housemaid who was listener.

"You jus' oughter see Miss Anne's

beau," she was saying; "he don't look any more like the young fellows 'round here than a thorough-bred horse does like some rack-a-bones belonging to poor white-trash. He's quality, sure enough! I knew that when I used to see 'em playing tennis and croquet over there in the Blossom Shop yard, and he was so straight and looked so high, his head always up, and then so gentlemanly to Miss Anne—though they did fuss something terrible after a while! Sometimes they'd act jus' like they didn't know the other was on the earth, but jus' the same I knew they were watching each other, out the corners of their eyes. Then they made a trip across the ocean together—the doctor and Miss Martha took Miss Anne, and he went 'long at the same time to see his father—and they went to his house and saw his mother's portrait hanging over

the mantel, in a velvet dress, and lace as fine as cobwebs around her throat and hands, just like life; and Miss Anne says it does seem like she is there all the time, Mr. Donald and his father love her so. After all that, I jus' knew they was as sure to marry as to-morrow was to come. When he came back the next year to go to school again they both seemed so grown up, and Miss Anne would sing to him something beautiful—for you know she's one of these 'primer-donners' at singing, and he called on her in the parlor, and they was mighty good friends, I tell you, but Miss Anne says they wasn't *thinking* 'bout being engaged till long after he went home the last time! I don't know what they *was* thinking 'bout then—it beats me! For he was handsome as a picture by this time and Miss Anne was growing prettier and prettier every day—but this here

love business there ain't no telling 'bout."

Anne listened in smiling fascination to this account of her love affair and the glowing descriptions of Donald especially held her to the spot while tea-cakes were forgotten.

Cahaba's graphic tongue then turned to the present, and she began strutting about the porch.

"I tell you, me and Miss Anne are going to be big folks! We won't be speaking to niggers like you, when we come home on visits. Why, Miss Anne will be having a cloth of gold dress, and it will be trimmed in diamonds all round the bottom and the low neck and the teeny short sleeves, which will show those lovely arms of hers! Then, of course, she will be having a white satin and it will be embroidered in silver—not just tinsel, but real silver—and beautiful pearls as

big as butter beans! Then oh, how it will train," while she swept across the porch with an imaginary train of prodigious length following her. "And *I* will be putting 'em all on her—for I'm to go with her as her 'lady's maid'!

"Then she'll have one of them crowns, made of gold and diamonds, on her head—you see, in England there are Kings and Queens and folks like Miss Anne, that's real quality, wears crowns every day!" With the advantage of education she could impress her untutored hearer to the nth degree.

Anne, listening, was convulsed by this time, and she exclaimed inwardly, "Oh, Cahaba, no amount of schooling can tone down your imagination!" Then she slipped away to laugh over it with her mother, Aunt Martha, May and Gene.

With the listening maid taking in and

passing on every word from Cahaba, Anne became Queen of the household, indeed, treated with wonderful deference by servants, and with a tender holding-close from her loved ones who were so soon to lose her.

CHAPTER II

GOWNS AND CROWNS

CHRISTMAS over, a temporary separation must take place at once for this pleasant family group. May was the first to go, as she must be promptly back at school for the after-holiday opening.

They sent her off one morning early, with her always rosy cheeks fresh-flushed from excitement of the coming trip, her dark eyes alert, and animation in every movement from the pretty hair, which matched her eyes, to the trim, well-dressed feet. She was the red rose in her garden of girls, the mother said—the Blossom

Shop idea for the family being always in her consciousness—and May was developing into a very attractive girl whose student tendencies kept social desires pretty well balanced. She could not live to be twenty in a Southern town without feeling strong social appeal, but the family had traveled a good deal to the North and East, and she also felt strong inclinations toward higher study.

“I am too lazy to do anything else but study and read,” she often laughingly said. “I don’t like housework a bit, though I am glad mother made me learn how to do all sorts of things. I am not going to marry, though” (with the calm, unalterable decisiveness of youth), “I am going to teach and sit in a rocking-chair and study!”

So there was an end of it.

The family, assembled at the little sta-

tion not far from their home, waved her good-by from the platform, while her rosy face looked back from a window, and she waved her handkerchief in return as long as she could see a faint speck of the old home town—never dreaming how unexpectedly all plans may be changed.

Uncle Doctor, Aunt Martha and Gene went next, a morning or two later. They were off for a trip to the iron and mountain regions of the State where little blind children might be hidden away needing treatment, perhaps, which would make the world a place of light and hope and beauty for them. Gene had a large fortune at her disposal, her mother having lost her share of Mr. Grey's estate upon her marriage to Mr. Carter, and she, with her Aunt Martha's help, had established in the East a sanatorium for the blind, to

which sightless children could go without money or price for treatment. Gene's first thought, after her own restoration, had been for other children who could not see, and she, Aunt Martha and the doctor had worked out plans for the sanatorium and for reaching needy children. In the South these children were to be found largely in the mountains, for blindness is peculiarly prevalent through all the Appalachian range, whose people have been hidden away in inaccessible fastnesses, multiplying and bringing forth generation after generation from the finest Anglo-Saxon stock in America, in a primitive ignorance and isolation that is unbelievable to those who have not investigated these regions. The little party planned the trip for mid-winter, as the traveling would be better than when the spring rains came on. It would be plea-

sant to be out in the open, too, in the fresh, crisp winter air.

As they stood on the platform at the station waiting for the little train to get ready to make a start—always an uncertain event—the doctor, big and sturdy, affectionately dictatorial and kindly humorous, blustered about in his restless way, his hat coming off frequently to stroke an unruly white forelock that the girls had always loved. Aunt Martha was her usual trim self, immaculately dressed, her slender figure and fresh face belying the snow-white hair. Gene, the third traveler, was the delicate pink and gold rose of her mother's garden—and it fitted her well; she was slightly built and delicately poised; her face was fair with only shell-pink in the cheeks; the eyes were sky blue, and the hair a crown of soft, curling gold. "My Marechal

Neil," her mother sometimes whispered in her ear, "all the soft tints of the rainbow which are gathered in its petals, make me think of you." She was a mother who said dear things, sometimes, to her children.

"We will put red roses in Gene's cheeks while we tramp about the mountains," said the doctor to Mr. and Mrs. Carter as they waited. "Anne," turning to her, "don't let those letters between you and Donald plow the ocean too constantly—they might bring ship-wreck to somebody."

He loved to tease Anne about those letters—and then the train showed signs of starting by sending forth a sudden sharp whistle, and the three travelers were soon waving good-by from slowly retreating windows while Mr. and Mrs. Carter, Anne and Murton Grey waved in return.

With the family back to the normal, Anne and Mrs. Carter could take up the matter of a trousseau.

Anne was her mother's "Dorothy Perkins" of the garden. Full of warm pink glow, her light brown hair catching every bit of sunlight, her gray-blue eyes full of laughter, her capable hands strong and firm, she was indeed like the sturdy pink Rambler running swiftly here and there, throwing out a profusion of bloom and fragrance in response to sun and rain.

Always enthusiastic, Anne had thought of a thousand things she would and would not get for that trousseau. Now, mother could sit down with her and talk it all over definitely. A nice store of dainty undergarments had been growing for several years, Anne putting many careful stitches into whipped ruffles and lace and beautiful embroidery; these were ready,

and gowns and wraps and hats were the things to think of now.

"Let's picture how you must look," said Mrs. Carter brightly, as they sat together in her room; "but we must try to forget Cahaba's magnificence," she laughed, "and we won't plan the crowns just yet!

"You must be well dressed always—everything you have of good—even fine material, and while there must be beauty, as a matter of course, there must also be dignity."

"Oh, mother, you scare me," cried Anne wide-eyed; "you know dignity is not my strong point!"

The mother laughed, "Not stiff dignity, no, but you are not lacking in the sort of dignity I mean, when occasion requires. As I see you gowned for presentation to the Queen, perhaps, I can see

without a bit of strained imagination all the dignity and poise I want to see."

"Mother," cried Anne again, "do you think I can ever stand before the Queen of England and not *die* on the spot?"

"I know you can," laughed the mother once more, then with a sweet dignity which was one of her own chief charms, she added, "Americans have no need to lose their self-respect before any Queen."

After Anne had had time to bring her American pride up to the proper standard, Mrs. Carter went on brightly: "There must be heavy white satin for the wedding gown itself, we will wish that for you—and it may be needed at that aforesaid presentation!"

"Every time you say anything like that the delightful shivers will continue to run right up my back," cried the girl; then quickly added, in spite of shivers,

“and there will be a long veil, won’t there—with orange blossoms?” she ended breathlessly.

“Yes, indeed,” smiled the mother. “There must also be a black velvet gown ready for the family laces of which Donald has told you, and evening gowns for various affairs, with at least a couple of silks and two or three walking suits of fine woolen goods—the English are great walkers, you know, and always dress suitably for it—do not wear just anything for a walk, as we are likely to do. You will have to observe very closely and conform to English standards, for Donald’s sake.”

“Oh, but, mother, do you think I can ever be discerning enough to see just what I should do?” And there was alarm in the young voice.

“I know you will,” said the mother, firmly reassuring. “You are really no

longer the old heedless Anne—and love is a wonderful guide for a woman!”

Anne's lovely face took on a bit of exaltation as she pledged in her heart loyalty to that guiding love even in the smallest detail of the coming life in a new-old world, with its fixed standards and royal ways.

“It is going to cost lots of money to get all those fine things and make my trousseau what it should be, isn't it, mother?” she asked after a time, anxiously, when all the details had been talked over.

Mrs. Carter's smile was ready again. “Oh, yes, your father and I have thought of this all along, and have been making provision for it. We feel that you should have everything suitable for your wedding outfit. We haven't been extravagant for a long time, but we are going to be now!” And the words were scarcely

out before she was smothered by two warm arms and a glowing face.

So the plans were made, and a trip at once for mother and daughter to New York for the outfit were included in them; Anne sang only glorias at the piano in her sweet, high soprano, while she absolutely trod on air during the daytime, and was apt to revel by night in gorgeous gowns at functions where Kings and Queens, Lords and Ladies bowed and promenaded through castle and tower and hall! It was fairy land come true for her, and through it all the days hurried on, till it was the one before their intended departure for New York,—and then out of a clear, sparkling sky came the hurrying cloud of calamity which, for a time, swept all life's fairies into oblivion.

CHAPTER III

FRUSTRATED PLANS

THE last thing had been carefully placed into Anne's trunk for the journey to New York and she was gleefully thinking, "This time to-morrow mother and I will be on our way," when chancing to glance out the window, she saw her father coming up the front walk with hasty stride. It was an unusual hour for him to be coming home, and with the query in mind as to what he was coming for, she ran down stairs to meet him. So exuberant and loving was she withal that any chance for fresh contacts, here and there, was welcome.

Her face was beaming as she opened the door at his touch on the knob, but the gay question, "What brings you home, honorable father?" (she was practicing on formalities these days, to be prepared for association with royalty) died on her lips at sight of his grim face. He did not even seem to see her as he strode past, straight to her mother's room.

Anne caught her breath with dismay, and as he mounted the stairs, stood looking after him like one stricken herself.

It was two hours before there was a move at the door of her mother's room; Anne waited out the time in her own across the hall, two hours of intense suspense, anxiety and dread. She prayed every minute, like a little child in sudden distress. At last her father came out, and rising instantly, she looked into his face to see the tenseness broken, but oh,

the face, the dear loved face, had aged ten years since the morning! Awed, but quieted with the childish prayer, she stepped forward and put out her hands to him.

He took them in a grasp that almost hurt.

"Daughter, can you bear disappointment—the undoing of all your plans"—then, as her face blanched with a look of terror, he added quickly, "Nothing has happened to Donald, it is misfortune for us only—but it means poverty, child, and no wedding things, for a time, anyway."

That would have been the very acme of calamity a few seconds before, but oh, the swift, cruel vision of Donald—dead, perhaps, made anything less seem as nothing.

Quickly she lifted her lips to his, and said, "Father, I can bear anything that you must bear."

Her young womanhood, though richly threaded with girlish enthusiasm, was a thing strong and true and ready, she was going to prove.

Holding her closely a minute, her father then released her, saying gently, "Your mother will tell you," and was gone again.

She did not have to wait many minutes before the mother's door opened. "You may come now, Anne, and we will talk about it," was the bidding.

The mother's voice was quiet, and there was a struggling smile, as she drew Anne in. "Father has told you something, has he not? Well, dear, it does not seem the calamity to me that it does to your father, for I have met poverty before," and the sweet, womanly face put on a reminiscent, old-time bravery, which had carried her blithely through the days

when she had made a living for her little blind girl, Gene, Uncle Sam and herself.

"If it were not for disturbing your plans, it would seem almost nothing," she added quickly.

"Mother, I have met my Waterloo, found it a merciful myth, and I am going to try to be ready for anything," cried Anne, smiling bravely, too. Then, seeing the mother's puzzled expression, she went on quickly, "Oh, I thought something had happened to Donald!" And the words were almost a whisper, drawing the mother's arms about her.

"You poor child!" she exclaimed, then, "Now, let's sit down and talk things over," and the girl was instantly at her feet, looking up into her face, prepared—determined to bear what she must without complaint.

"The trouble is just this," said the

mother, with the simple directness that was characteristic of her, "your father became security for Colonel Thompson on a note some years ago. It was merely a form, the Colonel said, and so it seemed, for with all his wealth there could be no danger. But it is rumored that he has taken to gambling lately and has lost heavily—something no one would ever have thought him capable of—but he has spent a good deal of time away it seems, and probably has been gambling on cotton futures. He never paid that note—has put the parties off from time to time, until at last exasperated, they have brought things to an issue. The Colonel, knowing that this was to come, and caring nothing how your father must suffer, has given everything he had left to his sister—who, of course, will only hold it nominally, and he can go serenely on his

wicked way while your father gives up everything he has in the world to pay his debt." The womanly face grew very firm as she told the brief tale, and Anne's indignation rose with the climax.

"Mother, can such a thing be? It is not right! He ought to be made to pay—not my father!" She had to pause for breath.

Mrs. Carter had long ago seen the futility of rage against injustice, and the bitter toll exacted from him who harbors it, so she relaxed the firm lines in her own face, and said, "It is unjust as it applies in many cases, but it is a law which has been found to be good for business as a whole, and we must abide by its decree with the best grace we can—and try to forget Colonel Thompson as much as possible."

"I can *never* forget his meanness!" cried

Anne, with the first hate of her life shining in her clear gray-blue eyes, and the mother said no more, for she knew youth must have more time than middle life to adjust itself.

“We will have to make changes in our way of living,” she said in matter-of-fact manner. “The house, you know, belongs to you and May; it was the gift of your grandparents to you at their death—so we cannot be turned out of house and home,” she declared brightly.

Anne could not lift the angry cloud from her brow—for anger is so much easier to admit than to expel, so she only said bitterly: “Well, I’m glad there is one thing that rascal cannot take from us.”

Mrs. Carter, seeing the transformation in that hitherto glad young face, suddenly took both slim hands in her own firmly.

"Anne," she said, "you believe I would not tell anything untrue, do you not?"

"Yes," said the girl dully.

"Well, I have tried hate in my life, tried it for years, and it only brings the ashes of bitterness to any one who harbors it. I have resolved never to let any injustice, which may come to me or mine, dim the sunshine for one day with the anger and resentment of my own heart. Just think, now, what it will mean if we begin an eternal hatred of Colonel Thompson. Any bright, beautiful day we may start out with gladness in every step—for such days are going to come to us again in spite of all this—and then we chance to meet Colonel Thompson on the next corner, and lo, all the joy of life immediately goes out, while we vent our hate upon—yes, upon a shameless man—who is not worth one gleam of joy from

our 'glad morning face,' as Stevenson puts it. Oh, Anne, trust one who has tried it—promise me now, before hate gets deep-rooted in your heart, that you will not harbor it."

The compelling earnestness of that face which was so dear to her, and that voice which had been so safe a guide for many years, broke the spell of hate in her face, and wondering much what experience mother could have ever had with hate—a thing so foreign to any knowledge the girl had ever had of that gentle personality—and she faltered at last, "I will promise to try, mother; that is all I can do just now."

"That is all I want," said the mother, for she knew Anne always meant what she said, and would make, even now, a genuine effort. Then, dropping into a playful way which they had always loved

as children, "You know we are a Blossom Shop family, and we must stick to the cultivation of flowers—not begin raising dank, ugly weeds!"

They laughed a little together, then the mother went on again about family plans: the servants must be dismissed. "I don't know about Uncle Sam and Mammy Sue," she ended with troubled voice; "they need us more than we do them. Yes, we will have to keep and care for them—but the others must go,—and how fortunate it is that we know how to do things, all of us!"

"Yes, I am glad we do," said Anne in colorless response.

"Now, as to your trousseau," went on Mrs. Carter, pressing the girl's hands again, "we will manage that, somehow, after a bit—not now, perhaps."

This roused Anne, and stirred all the

sleeping nobility within her. She had Donald—what was any sacrifice she might need to make? “Mother, don’t think of that now. I will write to Donald at once” (how her heart swelled with joy that she could!), “and tell him we are in trouble, and don’t know just what we can do for a while.”

Such relief came to the anxious mother in that satisfactory moment of the daughter’s testing, she almost yielded to grateful tears; but with both pairs of eyes shining through a watery veil, they kissed and separated, each to think things out in her own way.

When Anne reached her room she looked long at Donald’s picture, which always stood on her dresser—so life-like—light hair roached back from a broad, high forehead, frank, smiling face, strong and vivid and fine—and told him things

not intended for others; then she slowly crossed the floor and sat down at the front window facing the shrubs and flowers, hyacinths and jonquils sending up their bells and trumpets here and there, mid-winter prophecies of bloom and fragrance on the way. But she did not heed the sweet, familiar scene nor its prophecy. She was facing life in a new way—love and duty, selfish-desire and family-loyalty were sternly arrayed against each other.

She had proclaimed victory but a few moments before, declared she had met her Waterloo (Anne's figures of speech were always of English origin), proved it a merciful myth and now she was ready for anything. But in her own room, which had been her palace of dreams, she found that in the talks with father and mother she had only met and conquered an ad-

vance guard or two, and that a real battle was now before her.

Here, on her snow-white bed, had lain, in imagination, the shimmering wedding gown and filmy veil; before the mirror she had stood arrayed in its soft folds with the filmy cloud about her—and Donald, stepping out from his picture, had smiled high approval with glistening eyes and proudful lips—while over against these stood grim duty and sacrifice.

She fell back a little as the pictures of imagination crowded upon her, and pleaded: "I have not seen him for so long—so long—if he were here, no great ocean between us, it would be different—and the day is set, everything planned—Oh, I cannot—cannot wait!"

Weakness came: she knew that she had only to write to Donald of family troubles with selfish lament, and instantly he

would write back that he cared nothing for trousseaux—he would come immediately for her—and then her part in disagreeable new conditions at home would be over.

With sudden clarifying vision the issue was before her: should she do this, or be true to her best, highest self? Should she claim weak indulgence, or know sacrifice and be strong?

Impulsive and heedless by nature, life had already given Anne some valuable lessons, and her young heart had found a balance and steadiness not always acquired in youth. These came to her rescue.

An hour later and the best had won. Quietly she unfastened a jeweled locket which usually hung about her neck, and opening it, looked upon her own mother's girlish face—fair counterpart of her own, with the same merry, gray-blue eyes. It

had been her talisman for good since her fifteenth birthday.

“Mother, dearest, you had to leave the one you loved—and two babies!” she whispered.

So she had made her decision, and getting her portfolio, she sat down with her back to Donald’s picture, and wrote the letter telling him of the misfortune that had befallen her father, and that not only were wedding preparations impossible just now, but that she was needed in family readjustment—mother simply could not do all the work, May was away at school and must be allowed to finish her course which the school year would complete. Their wedding day would have to be postponed. It was a very straightforward, matter-of-fact letter, perhaps a bit rigid in its determined fidelity to duty, the slender hand gripping the pen tightly

as she wrote, and the young face finding a new, stern expression which gave the fluffy light brown hair, the sparkling gray-blue eyes and the warm pink cheeks emphatic affront. But, duty done, the grieved young heart plead for its rights, and there followed a broken little paragraph which told of yearning and renunciation between its lines.

It was done and signed and sealed. Arranging her hair with ready skill, according to a habit the years had fixed, she took her hat from the wardrobe shelf, for she was an orderly young woman, refused again to see Donald's picture as she did it, for she must not weaken now, and went to post the letter herself. It was her first experience in stepping out under a smiling sky, with the air fanning her face in gentle southern-winter mildness, and passing along familiar streets she had

known since babyhood, to find a sense of strangeness in it all; a shadow beneath the smiling sky, not cast by any floating material cloud, a brooding silence in the soft air, an alien look on familiar scenes which put a spell of awed depression upon the young spirit. But the exercise in warm sun and pleasant air refreshed her in the end, bringing her back to the normal as she was forced to meet young friends on the way home, and to laugh and chat with them as usual. Which was well, for she must learn the artifices of bravery, as well as resigned endurance.

At supper father and mother saw no hovering cloud upon the face of this eldest daughter of the house, but a quiet, womanly courage that gave ease and even pleasure at that first trying meal under the dominion of misfortune, and Murton Grey, the exuberant youngest member,

did not even suspect that anything was wrong anywhere in the whole happy world! It was better, father and mother had thought, to wait a little till their plans were more definitely mapped out, before telling him of coming changes.

Dismissing servants, a few days later, did not prove an easy task; on the contrary, it was most difficult to convince Mandy, the cook, that she must go, and not until a new home was found for her and her belongings moved there-to, would she leave, and then only with loud lamentation.

As for Cahaba, the cook's daughter, whose effects were moved at the same time, she held her head high, ignoring all indications of change and took the entire work upon herself as far as possible.

When Mrs. Carter remonstrated, she replied respectfully, but with high spirit:

"Why, Miss Alice, what you s'pose

Miss Martha would think of me if I left you-all now? She'd think I was one of these here niggers that when they look twicet into a spellin' book an' 'rithmetic, jes' unwrops their wooley hair, switches a trailin' dress around" (with mincing mimicry of manner and speech that was overwhelmingly funny), "an'—is too triflin' to bake a hoecake!" And her black eyes blazed.

"I ain't forgot, Miss Alice, an' I never will—that I was nothin' but a little, low-down, 'cornfield nigger' in a shirt tail and a coat of dirt when you picked me up an' brought me here. Think I'm going to leave you now? I don't want no pay. I'll get up early mornings and work after school, and I'll have oodles of time," ingratiatingly.

Her school ma'am speech, which fluctuated more or less in precision at home,

now disappeared altogether in the humility of her pleading.

It was a delicate matter for Mrs. Carter to put convincingly the fact that it was not only wages which must be considered, but the number of the family must be reduced as far as possible—and she did not add a further important consideration, that she, herself, could cook much more economically than any servant.

Cahaba's eyes grew wide with wonder and dismay. Such a thing as a few more or less to feed making any difference with white folks, had never dawned upon her, and with awed face she slowly wrapped up her apron and left, while Mrs. Carter, sitting in the kitchen alone, shed her first tears since the reverses came.

With Mammy Sue and Uncle Sam there was only proud rejoicing that they could not be spared!

CHAPTER IV

MAY TRAVELS UNEXPECTEDLY

A LETTER must go to May from her father quite promptly, for, when his financial status had been thoroughly looked into, it was found that she could not even finish the school year which would give her a diploma and make her ready for teaching. This greatly grieved Anne.

“Mother,” she said as the two talked it over in the quiet of Mrs. Carter’s room, “can’t we do *something* to keep May at school till the end of the year?”

“I do not see how, Anne. I have thought of everything, but there is really no way. Schooling in a great university

is a very expensive matter, now, and your father has been obliged to give up everything, absolutely, from which he has derived an income. You know the law business brings in very little in a small town like this, and his income has been almost entirely from the plantations which he has gradually acquired through the years, farming them on shares with his tenants. These have all been turned over in payment of that debt, now."

"Debt!" Anne exclaimed, in a moment's return of that first fiery indignation, and she was going to add "robbery," but a glance into her mother's serene though perplexed face, if the two can be imagined in combination, restrained her.

"No, debt, that is the proper word, Anne. Your father really signed the paper which obligated him, we must remember that, and he was not forced to do

it. He does not for a moment forget this in all his anxiety. His honor is very precious to him, and must be to us."

After a moment she went on: "I have thought of Gene, who has more money than she can spend, and I know will be broken-hearted when she finds that she cannot help us all in this calamity,—and I did think your father would let her advance the money for May to finish the year out, but he will not hear of it. I think he must be just a little rigid now, to bear all this, and so we must quietly wait till we are all adjusted, and find ourselves together in the new conditions. I don't doubt this is best, really, Anne, in my own heart, however much I may long to spare May her part of grief and disappointment."

So Mr. Carter's brief letter, stating facts and trying to be kind, reached May

one busy morning as she sat at her desk in her room at the university. "Why, it cannot be," was her first thought, drawing back in consternation and dropping the letter. "There is some mistake—Father not able to keep me at school, just till the end of the term—only three and a half months more? It is impossible." Dazed, she picked up another letter which had come in the same mail, not noticing that it was in her mother's handwriting till she had mechanically torn it open. Then, when she saw the familiar writing, her heart gave a throb of joy. Mother would make it all right, some way—she always did! And she eagerly read the eight page letter, but it could not alter facts, these still stood in unmoved phalanx before her. However, there was a warm, tender putting of everything, even a cheery forecast of how busy they

were going to be with interesting plans, as soon as she got home to help them. This was a bit soothing to the ruffled spirits, but it could not take away the main fact—that she must leave school at the end of the first half term, and this continued to rankle terribly. She stopped reading the letter to dry her eyes and lament depressingly, then went on again with dull sensibilities to read of Anne's great disappointment. Her marriage must be postponed. That was startling for a moment, and she gave her sister a fleeting bit of sympathy—only to come quickly back to her own grievance.

Well, Anne could be married any time,—any time—it didn't take a diploma to get married—but she—she couldn't teach till she had her diploma, and now she would *never* get it. *She* didn't want to marry—she had never seen anybody she

wanted, but she had always thought it would be fine to teach!

So, the protesting tearful soliloquy went on, her feelings more and more agitated, till when her room-mate came in, she was weeping so the story could hardly be told. It came out in sobbing intervals which left the room-mate, a pretty, indulged girl, also in tears. It was not long till the news spread through the school to her friends, who gathered about her at once and May was in a fair way of posing as a martyr, had not a big, whole-souled, abrupt, sensible girl happened in just then and come to the rescue. She was Kate Shaw, the homeliest but best-loved girl in the school.

"Now, May Carter," said Kate, with a flourish of her big, kind hand when the story had been unfolded to her, with May gently weeping for an accompaniment,

“don’t you go to feeling sorry for yourself! That is the worst thing anybody can do! Of course it’s bad—I’m not saying it isn’t—for you to have to leave school, but there are lots of things worse! You’ll miss final exams, for one thing, when you have to be kept on the rack for days till you find out whether you have passed or not. And then you can go *home*, and you’ve got one to go to,—and a father and mother there when you get there! That’s what *I* haven’t got—just a mean old aunt that makes me walk a chalk line—and that’s how I came to know that it was no good to feel sorry for yourself. You’ve just *got* to take things as they *are*, and learn how to stand them, and have a good time! Now, come on here with me,” and she put her big arms, which all the girls knew to be tender and strong, around May and laughingly carried her off.

What more was said to May in the quiet of Kate's room the other girls never knew, but it was something helpful and true out of a lonely experience of life. May held her head up at the end and promised Kate she was not going to "flunk" whatever came. So the first upheaval passed, and, once more in her own room, reading father's and mother's letters over again, she caught glimpses of their keen regret in this disappointment for her, which she had failed altogether to see in the first selfish reading.

A few days later she bade good-by to the school friends and teachers with an aching heart, but a very brave front, considering it was her very first encounter with real trial, and she took the train, with an effort to make the best of everything. Kate was the last of all to stoop and kiss her, slipping into the train after

May was seated ; and then, flying off without a word, her tall, swaying figure made a hasty run to get off the car before the train started.

Seated in the coach with her belongings comfortably disposed of, and having looked about to see if any one was on board whom she knew or who appeared especially interesting, and deciding to the contrary, May settled herself to read, she thought, but really to think. The past few days had been so exciting she could not hold her attention to a book, it dropped in her lap, and gradually the picture of school life and the girls at the train to see her off became dimmer, while a new-old vision of home grew in definite outline. She knew mother was busy readjusting household matters and planning something helpful ; she could not imagine just what, but mother always knew what

to do in any emergency, and she could not think of the dear face with anything but the bright, capable expression it always wore. Anne would be at her hand, helping wherever she could, and making gay while she did it. She couldn't recall Anne without seeing sparkling eyes and hearing ready laughter, so the shadow lifted its heaviest folds, as it readily does for the young, and she looked forward to getting home with growing joy; watched passing town and country and village, or read a little as she felt inclined, till the night came on without incident, and she went to her berth for a night of youth's perfect sleep in spite of life's calamities and the noise of hurtling train and screeching whistles.

After having her breakfast next morning she took out her book again, but the brakeman called a station just then, and

she turned to look out, when a sudden commotion in some seats in front of her caught her attention, and she saw an odd-looking little old lady grab up an old-fashioned green carpet-bag, a faded umbrella and paper lunch box, and rush frantically for the car door.

But the conductor met the frantic rush with an emphatic, "No, you don't," holding the old lady firmly while she poured out a volley of vehement French. Then, as the train started once more, May watched interestedly while he led the protesting passenger back to her seat; mopping his brow wearily, he explained to her with marked emphasis that she had all day yet to travel before she reached her destination. The old lady shrank back into her seat under his emphasis, and the conductor, big and forceful—but not unkind—walked down the aisle. Stopping

at the seat of a gentleman in front of May, he paused and relieved his mind.

"That's the way it has been all night. She got on at Louisville, about nine o'clock, and she wouldn't undress and go to bed. Had her berth made up, but just sat on the edge of it with her hands on her things, and every few minutes she would fly to the door with them,—if we made a stop, or if she thought we were going to. A time or two she got plumb outside, and she and me both come mighty near gettin' left while I was gently persuading her to come back. But I got onto her racket at last, and I dropped the gentle act. I just had to," he added apologetically, "she's so determined." Then he lowered his voice: "What folks let a looney like that travel alone for, is beyond me."

And as he passed on, evidently the

easier for freeing his mind, May noticed a tall, well-proportioned gentleman of perhaps twenty-seven to thirty years, who had come in at the last station. He had sat down opposite her and was already deep in a book, so she only gave him passing interest and it was but a few minutes till the old lady became active again. She started down the aisle, this time without her assortment of baggage, her little bent figure alert with springs in every joint, and a wrinkled, smiling old face turned eagerly toward first one, then another of the passengers, seeming to expect that she might know some of them. Coming eagerly along, she spied a baby to which a young couple were giving devoted care. She darted to the seat opposite which accommodated baby's voluminous belongings, and sitting upon the edge, she cooed in softest French, "Ah, the darling baby"

—he would understand her language if nobody else could—putting her face close to the wee pink one while the young mother bridled and squirmed, and the young father scowled. Then, she was going to take the baby into her arms, whether or no, and alarm took the place of anxiety with the young mother. A lady passenger sitting opposite kindly drew the old lady's attention elsewhere at this juncture, and finally led her back again to her seat, where she remained quiet for a time.

May had watched it all with amused interest, and glancing across involuntarily at her gentleman neighbor who had recently come in, they exchanged a spontaneous smile. Remembering instantly that he was a stranger—and a man, too, her eyes quickly went back to her book, and kept assiduously there. Ere long the

neighbor left his seat and walked back to the vestibule, and he had not more than left it before the little old lady began her restless investigations once more. This time she passed by the couple with the baby and came eagerly and expectantly on down the aisle toward May's seat. Here she paused, and May watched intently to see what she would do. Her interest was with the neighbor's traps, however, and not with May. An unusual hand bag of unmistakable foreign make in the seat had caught her eye. It had been made in her beloved France—she knew that in an instant, and with a little glad cry in French she dropped into the seat—squarely upon the gentleman's hat!

May saw the catastrophe and flew impulsively to the rescue.

"You have sat upon the gentleman's hat," she cried in spontaneous French,

which was so good that the little old lady sprang to her feet in response, but her thought was all upon the dear, spoken French, and she embraced May and cried, "You speak the beautiful Français!"

Pleased with the compliment, for she did pride herself upon her French, May said:

"Just sit here a minute," placing her in her own seat, "and I will talk to you as soon as I straighten the man's hat out."

She proceeded to do this, but with poor success, for it was a stiff derby and had been most thoroughly crushed. While she busied herself with it the gentleman himself was suddenly at her elbow. He had seen enough as he entered the coach to guess what had happened and smilingly said, "We have had an accident, have we?"

May smiled back in return and replied,

"I am afraid it was a fatal one for your hat," handing it to him. "I have done the best I could for it, but that was little."

"On the contrary, you have proved very valuable first-aid-to-the-injured, and I thank you most warmly."

May bowed pleasantly in return and slipped into her seat by the old lady, who was anxiously crying in French, "Tell him I so regret," and the girl turned again toward him to repeat and translate the message.

He thanked her once more with earnest assurance that the matter was of no consequence whatever; the hat was an old one, quite ready to be retired.

May, in turn, repeated this pleasant assurance to the old lady in French, but her nervousness had increased with the little accident, and the girl impulsively laid her hand on the withered, restless one to hold

attention while she talked quietly even in the beloved native tongue. But the old lady wanted to talk herself all the time, and it only excited her the more, so May finally took out a book of short stories in French, which she had in her bag, and began reading them aloud to her. The even flow of words in the tongue she knew gradually quieted the nervous old woman, and May soon found that she was fast asleep. Gently arranging her more comfortably in the seat, by giving her the whole of it, May slipped noiselessly out, and as she did so, the gentleman across the way looked up pleasantly again, and said softly, "Congratulations!"

May smiled unaffectedly in return, and passed along the aisle to a vacant seat further down. She had only sat there a few moments, however, when the gentleman rose and came back also.

Stopping by her seat, he said, "I beg pardon most earnestly for seeming to attempt to pursue your acquaintance, but I am president of a girls' college," and he handed her a card, "and I have something to say to you that may possibly be of interest. I feel impressed that it will be,—and my mother has great faith in my impressions."

His face was plainly one to trust with its brown eyes that looked frankly into hers, its large mouth, a bit crooked at one corner from its firm setting as he concentrated in reading or study, and then relaxed in a slow smile which sent the lips up in the center and left one corner still holding to the serious things of life. His hair took care of itself in free, waving, abundant locks that dropped on the high forehead with pleasant ease and fitted well with a manner of dress that was good and

comfortable, rather than elegant, and evidently did not occupy the owner's thought. He was married, of course, had been May's first subconscious decision about him, and she had given that matter no definite debate since.

She was now surprised at his proposition to talk with her, but she, like most Southern-reared girls, did not know prudishness, and frankly made place for him, after glancing at his card which read: "Addison Humphrey Vernon, President Addison College for Women, Blakeville, South Carolina."

When seated, he turned to her at once with his errand.

"The situation is this with me: I am president of a girls' college, you see—not by right of attainment, however, I might as well say at once," he put in with that slow smile, and the serious corner almost

winning the balance of power, "but rather by right of inheritance. My grandfather founded the college; then my father followed him, and for two years previous to his death I did his work; so, untried as I am in many things, the trustees made me president at his death—and I am endeavoring to live up to their confidence.

"So much for preliminaries," he ended, after a moment's pause, and May listened with interest which was not in the least spoiled by self-consciousness. "Now, for the present: my language teacher married a few days ago—after a fashion folks have, you know, sometimes," and again there was the slow smile, "and she gave us no notice—didn't know herself, she claims—and I suppose that is a way life has too, sometimes, so we must accept it—but it did leave us much embarrassed, to say the least. I have some names from

teachers' agencies," and he took a list of four or five names from his pocket, "but I have just made an unprofitable trip, and I feel—I was going to say intuitively, but I believe that is woman's prerogative exclusively—so I will say, that I have suspicions that the trip I am on now to see another, is going to result in the same way—hence, therefore—to be school-manlike—I am talking to you, because—if you will pardon me, I will say frankly—I could not help listening to your fine French in your talk and reading to that old lady, and I have come to inquire if, by any chance, the love of teaching has ever touched your heart."

He turned and looked earnestly in her face as he spoke, as though he would wake the teaching instinct within her if he could, and under this compelling gaze she cried eagerly:

"Oh, I do so want to teach—but,—I can't," and unheralded, unbidden, demoralizing tears suddenly threatened to overcome her! She struggled desperately with herself while he instantly turned his head and said:

"That is true, we cannot always do just what we wish. But, sometimes we are mistaken, about things we can and cannot do! Would you mind—if I am not intruding—telling me why you cannot?"

Marriage would have been the thing to think of first with so attractive a young woman, but that would not have held tears so near the surface—and, somehow, he felt impelled to probe a bit.

May had herself pretty well in hand by this time, so she said, with a touch of her father's recent rigidity, "I have no diploma."

"No diploma!" And he turned that

smile in full right of way upon her, while his eyes twinkled so kindly that she relaxed at once, "A diploma is fine and worth working for, no doubt about that, but it is not the whole of the matter. How near were you to the pesky thing?" he ended, with a homely warmth that won her completely.

She told him the whole story then; of the family reverses, and her forced return home with only a half term to complete her course and win her diploma.

He questioned her carefully as to the ground she had covered in her study, and at the end he turned to her again with that winning look: "I am fully satisfied, not only with your attainment in scholarship, but also with your tact and readiness in emergency—your kindly spirit of helpfulness in handling that erratic old French woman! I beg your pardon again for

observing you so closely. I *want* you for French and German teacher in my school. I do not want to look further for a teacher—diploma or no diploma!”

May was perfectly amazed, and delighted beyond measure—but would father let her?

She turned her glad, but uncertain face to him. “Oh, I would so love to—but I do not know that father would let me. He will think I should complete my course first—and he will feel that I am not old enough to teach, yet!”

“Well, we will go and ask him anyway,” and the combination mouth, with the firm corner in full evidence, was not to be gainsaid.

“What do you mean?” asked May, astonished.

“I mean just that! I will go with you to your home—we will reach there by six

o'clock this evening—and I was intending to go on down to Mobile to see a teacher there. Instead, I will stop off and go up to your place to see your father."

He did not put it again, "I will go with you," but May was fully conscious that she must appear at the home station, where her father would meet her, with a strange man! What would he think?

"Now, don't worry in the least about it, Miss Carter," he said. "I will take the whole responsibility in the matter."

And there was something so re-assuring about him, in his strength and in his kindness, that May did cease to worry and gave herself up to the joy of thinking that she really might be going to teach, right away.

They talked together for sometime while the old lady continued to sleep peacefully, for she had been utterly worn

out with the long night's nervous vigil, and discussed teaching methods and school conditions at Addison, looking over some recent pictures he had of the buildings, but touching the personal side, as related to him, very little, though he spoke once or twice of his mother. The question came inevitably to May now, "Is he married or single?" but she could not determine.

When the old lady awoke at last, May went at once and took charge of her again. It was a new world to the strained nerves after the refreshing sleep, and, with some one to tell her about train conditions and just what to expect when May should leave the train, which she soon must do, the old lady found quiet and confidence, so that when she should meet her son, with whom she was going to make her home in the future, it would be with a natural hap-

piness. The conductor joined them before May had finished her explanations, and she acted as interpreter for the two, till the vexed look faded from the big, rough face and the old lady smiled up at him with confiding trust.

She was hardly through when Professor Vernon touched her arm, and reminded her that they would soon be at the junction of roads where they would change for the branch line which went to May's little Alabama home town.

They made the change, the little train was on time, and it was only a brief hour before they would be at the station. This was passed pleasantly, for Professor Vernon again mentioned the girl's tact and kindness with the little old lady, and being so near home with its glow growing upon her, May laughed and said, "Well,

you see, we are a Blossom Shop family, and we have to live up to it!"

The professor repeated the phrase with pleased questioning: "Blossom Shop family—that sounds very enticing—please elaborate for me."

Then she told him all the story of the Blossom Shop and the family principles which had grown out of it, ending merrily:

"My blossoms all turn to languages, you see, and I have to look out for foreigners everywhere. Anne's blossoms are musical, and she loves to sing whenever she is asked. Our minister says she preaches better sermons, often, than he does in church. She does sing beautifully. Donald says her blossoms are destined to become the choicest English house-plants in the British possessions—but it will not be soon, now, with this

trouble," and her face sobered at the thought of Anne's cloud, for which there was no prospect yet of silver lining, as in her case.

"What about Miss Grey's blossoms?" asked the professor with the warmth of an old friend amused and charmed with this girlish and most unusual family unfolding which had fallen into unexpected freedom since they were going "home" together—and wishing instantly to lift the shadow from her face.

"Oh, Gene does everything well—and is simply lovely—though she says her blossoms are the poorest of all—just money—but I think that sort of blossoming would be pretty good for us, about now."

Then quickly remembering that this might seem to imply withholding on Gene's part in this family crisis, she hur-

ried to say, "Gene would gladly give us everything she has, but father will not let her. I thought he was wrong, at first, not to let her help us a little," she added with a certain urgent honesty, "but I don't now."

Before it seemed possible the train was slowing up—and there was Mr. Carter coming into the coach. May's heart went into her throat, an instant, as she remembered she must introduce a strange, unexpected man to him, but she had not had social training for naught, and after greeting her father warmly—noting even in that moment with fresh heart-throb, how old and worn and unlike himself he looked—she turned with girlish, but genteel directness, and introduced Professor Addison Vernon.

Mr. Carter gave a keen, startled glance at the stranger, and extended his hand

courteously, but with evident question, which Professor Vernon answered at once:

"I am here, Mr. Carter," taking out a card as he spoke, and handing it to Mr. Carter, "to try to secure your daughter as teacher in our college."

Mr. Carter looked at the card and heard the statement in natural surprise touched with amazement.

"I do not know about that," said he, slowly, at length.

But they must leave in order for the train to move on—which had the accommodating way of waiting for passengers' pleasure rather than hurrying them off at any railroad schedule's behest—and they made their way out to the station platform where they paused again while Professor Vernon made further request.

"May I call upon you this evening and present my case fully?"

"If that is your errand here, you must come to my home," said Mr. Carter with the quick, unfailing hospitality of his kind, "but I warn you there is little likelihood of my allowing this child to begin teaching. She is unequipped—but we will talk of that later. Come with us," and, as they stepped briskly away to walk the short distance between the station and the Carter home, May's heart fell. No, her father would not let her go, she knew it!

"I thank you very much for your invitation, Mr. Carter," protested the Professor, "but I feel that it would be an imposition to accept it. I am travel-stained, as you see, and forced by—well—shall I say good or ill-luck"—and he smiled at May, "to wear a very disreputable hat."

"A funny old French woman sat on it, father," laughed May, and so the walk to the house was made without constraint as she briefly told the story and Mr. Carter with quiet, final courtesy insisted that Professor Vernon be his guest, when they reached the home gate.

CHAPTER V

NEW INDUSTRIES AND PHILOSOPHIES

THERE was naturally wonder, in Mrs. Carter's and Anne's courteous greeting of Professor Vernon, after loving gathering-in of May on the part of both.

Mr. Carter said in immediate explanation to Mrs. Carter, as they seated themselves in the parlor, when Anne, with an arm about May, had carried her up-stairs to her room, "Professor Vernon comes in the hope of securing May as teacher in his school."

Professor Vernon bowed in smiling acquiescence, remarking apologetically, "I am afraid this will make me seem still

more an intruder, Mrs. Carter; but when I lay the whole matter before you, I hope to commend my case to you."

Then, with desire for immediate frankness, which should define his personality and standing as clearly as possible for them, he made the statement as to his coming into the presidency of the school which he had already given to May, and remembering the delightful family confidences which had made them all seem as old friends to him, he added with his crooked smile, "I am a bachelor, my mother holding the balance of power in the school and keeping me in countenance before the young ladies. I did not tell Miss Carter this on the trip to-day, for, from her modest demeanor, I feared I might not prove so acceptable a traveling acquaintance. This may have been a mistake, perhaps I should not have sailed

under false colors; if so, I beg you will forgive an error of judgment. I am not a ladies' man, as you may see, but a book-worm, and perhaps a moth-eaten bachelor," he ended with whimsical charm that won them both.

Up-stairs Anne promptly cried to May: "Where did you get him? He is fine! I could tell that the minute I looked into his face."

May laughed with girlish scorn, "Oh, he is nothing to get—he's married, I know."

"How do you know—where did you get him?" Anne came back at her, quickly.

"Oh, you are always seeing romances, Anne, because you have one on hand yourself," said May with sisterly frankness. "I tell you he is married!"

"But, you do not *know*," persisted Anne. "I say he is not—not even en-

gaged. There is something about his face that just tells me so."

"Well, I suppose you are an expert in these matters, just now," said May, as she laid off her hat at the mirror, and finding everything just as it always had been in her room, the last bit of hovering cloud disappeared from her horizon for the moment, and what cared she whether any man was married or single? It was so good to be at home, and then Murton Grey came bounding in to give her a little peck on the cheek supplemented by joyful greeting from his twinkling eyes, and proceeded at once to tell her about a wagon he and another boy were building. Mammy Sue appeared next in her familiar dark calico and big white apron, her face shining, and took her child in her arms, after the fashion of colored mam-mies of old.

"How is dear old Uncle Sam?" asked May warmly.

"He's mighty porely, Miss May, chile," said Mammy Sue mournfully. "I'se oneasy 'bout him all de time, now."

"Oh, I'm so sorry," exclaimed May. "I'll go out to see him as soon as supper is over."

Mrs. Carter next appeared in the room and gave the home-coming girl another welcome, for, with the stranger at hand it had not quite satisfied her heart.

"How well and fine you look," she said, then—"my own brave girl," was whispered in the young ear.

"It doesn't require much of that to come home and see you-all," May returned, but the mother knew and understood, nevertheless.

"Mother," put in Anne, "don't you like Professor Vernon? I didn't see him only

a minute, but I liked his face *so* much." Anne always knew instantly whether or no she liked folks.

"Yes," said Mrs. Carter, "I do, for so short an acquaintance."

"Do you think he is married?" cried Anne, again. "May contends he is, but I say he isn't—what do you think about it?"

"I don't think," returned Mrs. Carter, smiling. "I know—he has informed us—he is a bachelor."

"There,—I told you so," cried Anne triumphantly. "I knew!"

"Well," said May, with the disdain of youth as yet untouched by vital interest as to the statistics of men in general or particular, "your discernment is beyond mine, I know, in such things." And there was a palpable hint of superiority in this state of ignorance.

But Anne only laughed happily, and retorted, "Never mind, it will come to you yet!"

She was so blissful in her love for Donald that she could not help wanting to bring her sisters into the charmed circle of hearts secure, and with it there was a bit of anxious yearning over this pretty, non-understandable May, who did not seem in the least concerned about beaux, and was always talking about teaching!

Mrs. Carter smiled with comprehension for both; she knew that May's indifference was likely to vanish at any moment, like dew on the rose leaf under a sudden flash of sun.

They all went down-stairs together, May and her mother with Murton Grey under her arm to the parlor, while Anne slipped into the dining-room to prepare

an extra place for the visitor and to give some last touches to the table.

When all were seated and supper in progress May was reminded that the changes were real at home, as no maid appeared to serve them, and Anne rose to get whatever was needed, while Mammy Sue attended to the baking biscuits in the kitchen. But conversation was easy and pleasant, even merry, as they went over together the episode with the old French woman.

After supper, with the family, except Murton Grey, present, Professor Vernon presented his case in full, and, when the conference was over, it was decided that May should try the teaching for the remaining half term at least, the professor's crowning and most conclusive argument being that there was no better way to learn than by teaching. He said he had

tried it, and knew whereof he spoke. "You see, I am not now a real president or professor of my school. I have simply slipped into their clothes ahead of time and am growing to them," he ended, with the whimsical charm that was very winning.

He left next morning, with the feeling on both sides that a real friendship had begun, and May was to go later, after a few days' rest and preparation.

She was extremely happy over the prospect of teaching, but the few days' stay at home revealed changed conditions there in a very realistic way. Her father was silent, and gray of hair and face; it seemed to them all they could see the dark locks whiten as they looked at them. Anne and her mother were doing the cooking and housework, while Mammy Sue lingered distractedly around, unable to

reconcile herself to it, and yet unable to do the work herself on account of growing feebleness, and the constant care Uncle Sam required. When it came to the weekly family washing she was simply beside herself as mother and daughter proposed to do it.

"Miss Alice," she cried, agonizingly, "you larnt my chillun to sweep an' dus' an' make beds, an' I stood it—an' I don't know but you was right wid de ole times done gone in de Souf, but ef yo' sen' 'em to de wash tub, I'll die, Miss Alice, I sho' will!"

And Mrs. Carter really feared the old woman would; so, as few clothes as possible were given to Mammy Sue to wash, and the old woman found strength to do them, bringing them in with a delight that was soul-satisfying for her,—and she never dreamed that "her chillun" were

surreptitiously adding their strength and skill to hers!

"Now, May," Anne would say, "I'm going to wash out this shirt waist, but don't you let Mammy Sue catch me. I'll hang it up in the bathroom and lock the door for it to dry, but the key will be under my pillow." And they had great fun out-witting Mammy Sue, giving a decided zest to laundry work, while the old woman's failing eye-sight prevented her from suspecting the work was not her own, and so the subterfuges went on successfully.

Preparations were being made for a renewal of the flower business which Mrs. Carter, Gene and Uncle Sam had pursued for so long, and they hoped to market a good supply of Cape jessamines in the early summer, shipping them to Northern city florists. Anne did not sing much

these days, May noticed, but she was very busy, and preparing to help with the flower business in a cheerfulness that made the younger sister marvel. She did not care much, after all, for Donald—not enough to go away from them all to a home across the ocean—was the sister's comfortable conclusion.

But one evening her father came in the library, as the two girls sat reading in the early lamp glow of the short Southern twilight, and brought Anne a letter with the English post mark and bold handwriting upon it which both knew, and Anne's face as she took it, was a study in joy, anguish, dread, with the sweet control she was striving for holding all in quivering leash, which made even inexperienced May turn away in quick tears and an inward choking, "Oh, poor Anne!"

It was only a moment that the pathetic

vision remained before them; catching her lip to steady it, Anne rose, smiled bravely at them all, then flew up-stairs to her own room with the letter. When she came down later to help with the supper, her eyes held a new soft tint that made May wonder still more. She couldn't forget Anne's face when she took the letter, however, and said earnestly, "You needn't help with supper, Anne; I can do it all, I know."

"Oh, but I want to," returned Anne. "I feel just like it," but she gave May a quick hug, both to hide the sparkle of tears and to show her appreciation of the unspoken sympathy which had prompted the offer.

"I will tell you about Donald's letter when we go up-stairs to bed," whispered Anne.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Carter looked anx-

iously toward Anne at supper, but she was the same capable Anne, with an undercurrent of something new but not alarming, about her, and they felt a quick sense of relief, that another dreaded milestone along their path of misfortune had been passed. They had said nothing to each other, but both had anxiously awaited the girl's first letter from her lover after he should know of the entire change of circumstances and plans. Anne had done nobly, left to herself, but what would she do under the possible pleading or upbraiding of Donald?

Supper went much as usual, Murton Grey being a great safety valve in these trying times, for his interests went on unabated, family pauses only giving him the greater opportunity to tell of some wonderful kite, wagon or boat which he was making. After it was over and the dishes

done, Anne slipped into the library where her father sat reading, and putting her arms about his neck a moment, and her cheek against his, she whispered, "It's all right, father." She would have flown as quickly, but his arm went about her and she knew he was whispering, "My precious child," in his heart, as well as though she had heard it. Then she motioned to her mother and the three, mother and two girls, went up-stairs to talk the letter over.

When they were seated in Mrs. Carter's room, Anne in her old place at her mother's feet, she began:

"Donald is just lovely about it all, Mother; he says he can see how you do need me here, just now, and that he is going to abide entirely by my judgment."

"That is beautiful of Donald," said Mrs. Carter warmly, "but I always knew

we might expect fine things of him, and you just tell him when you write, Anne, that we are going to turn Cape jessamines and Southern smilax into wedding finery just as fast as we can—we are not a Blossom Shop family for nothing!”

Then the three discussed plans enthusiastically. Anne had read of baskets being made of pine needles, and had written to the editor of the magazine where she had seen it to get some instructions as to the making.

“How are you going to sell them when you do get them made?” asked May.

“Why, there are Woman’s Exchanges in the big cities now, and I can send them there to be sold. Just to think of turning poor old pine needles as well as flowers into wedding finery, mother! I will have to forgive the big, gaunt old trees, I guess, for making me feel lonesome with their

sighing, many and many a time when I was a child—and didn't have any mother." And in characteristic warm-heartedness she reached out with appreciative touch for the hand of that loving mother-instead; then added, "Really though, I don't think pines have any business being about motherless children! I am willing to forgive them for everything else.

"There is another possibility, too, May, I haven't told you of," she went on—"and it calls for more forgiveness of childish grudges. You know how we used to hate china-berries? They were so mushy and ugly smelling—ugh, they make me shiver right now to think how we would have to walk over them, sometimes, when they were dead-ripe yellow and covered the ground, and they would stick to our shoes!"

"What in the world can be done with them, I'd like to know?" cried May, with old disgust. "I'd have to handle them with a forty-foot pole, if I had anything to do with them!"

Anne laughed gayly, "Why, you turn them into necklaces, if you please!"

"Not me," cried May again; "I don't want any china-berries around my neck!"

"Oh, but they are china-berries no more! Instead, they are lovely tinted beads of pink or blue, or lavender or black, or any color you choose to make them. I saw the illustration, and they are lovely—most promising for wedding finery—lots more so even than pine needles! You just dry them thoroughly, scrape them down to the corrugated seeds, and then dye them any color you want, and string them. Sometimes real beads are put with them of pearl or jet and you

would never dream they were old china-berries in a previous incarnation! I think they are the most promising things yet, for conversion into wedding finery.

"Then there is still another possibility, that is delightful all the way through," said Anne. "Northern people don't know anything about our dear little chin-capins; all they have is just sober chest-nuts. They never even heard about saucy, ripe chincapins raining down in crisp, brown leaves when you shake the trees in the fall, and hiding so you can't find them without racing around after them, down the hill sides and under the leaves, Aunt Martha once told me. And, you know, when you do find them they are the sweetest little nuts to eat that grow. I am going to gather them in the fall and ship them North, and I do believe they will sell!"

"I should think so," returned May, "for people who don't have chincapins are certainly missing something. And I tell you what would be nice—put in each box directions for children how to string them and make necklaces which they can eat off as they want to, for nothing is more fun than that," and she laughed in happy recollection.

"Fine!" exclaimed Anne; "we will just do it! Oh, we'll be millionaires by next year!"

"And wedding finery will abound," put in Mrs. Carter gayly. "I'll tell you, girls, what we can do when we develop all these promising veins; we can open a shop for the evolution of wedding garments—after we have sent Anne off with her Cinderella outfit" (remembering Anne's delayed hopes)—"and May is tired of teaching, perhaps," but at the shake of a determined

young head, she substituted, "Or we can make it a vacation industry. I think it would be a quite harmonious side line for The Blossom Shop family to pursue. They are supposed to make all sorts of bloom and fragrance put forth from the homely soil and barren spots, so wedding garments evolved from pine needles, chin-capins and china-berries, would be simply a crowning performance!"

And thus they made merry over the new methods of money-making for which Anne was really earnestly searching. She had seen during the last month that the poverty which had come so suddenly upon them was not by any means a myth. There was absolutely no ready money to be spent, the thought of debt was impossible, Mr. Carter having strong convictions on the subject in the large sense, and Mrs. Carter, in her long struggle for a

living for herself and child, having imbibed an intolerance for it in little things as well, which she had imparted to the three children in her care for so many years. They had come to know that money was not to be spent till it was in hand to spend, and it was a matter for no discussion whatever. They had been given allowances through the years and taught to make them cover needs, or there must be wholesome doing without. So, now, Anne knew no exception could be made of "wedding finery," as she put it—and there must be no thought of buying it till a substantial way of meeting family needs was provided, but it was a bit heartening to have it talked about gayly, and this was the feeling with the trio.

Donald's letter had really been a relief to the girl, as well as to her father and mother, and there must be some reaction

in gayety. Besides, she was treasuring deep in her heart a very precious paragraph which gave all the world a rose tint, but could never be shown to any one. It was this:

“Oh, Anne, my soul went down so deep into the sea of despair when I learned that you could not come with me for an indefinite period yet, that I was blinded with the muddy waters, and I could not see how fine you were in all your self-sacrifice at home, till at last the sweet vision dawned upon me at a hint from father, and I came up washed clean of selfishness, with a flood of gratitude and humility. Such a girl as you are, is worth waiting for as long as she decrees! Do you remember the first time you saw me, how I was buried deep in the miry mud, and how

you, with your dear tousled head and shining gray-blue eyes, pulled with all your strength to get me out? That was in the physical; now you have done the same thing for me spiritually.

“And, do you know, Anne, I can hear you singing every evening in the music-room. It never has forgotten that you sung there once!”

Could anything be dearer than that? Anne thought not, and no wonder her heart was all the blither for its new, deep experiences of life.

The next day she and May were going up the street to see some friends, for May was leaving for her teaching engagement the day following. They were talking brightly together, when lo, who should be coming down the street but Colonel Thompson, their new arch enemy!

May stopped still a moment. Anne grasped her hand hurriedly, "Oh, May, don't let him see you stop," and pulled her along. Fortunately Colonel Thompson was looking down, and he was far enough away for them to talk with freedom.

"I just hate him," May protested; "I don't want to meet him!"

"Well, but you are not the guilty one," said Anne; "you certainly don't want to act as though you are!"

May had not thought of this phase of the matter; in fact, there are many things to be carried out in the pursuit of hate, delicate interlapping motives and desired appearances, which only the adept in the business knows how to manage. Anne had been along the path for a month now, and she had learned some of the intricacies; but with the promise to her mother that she would not harbor hatred, her eyes

were opened to the cost and futility of it for a life motive. Several beautiful mornings, which had been saved from spoiling by speaking to Colonel Thompson in the old friendly way, stood to her credit—and satisfaction, so when May added to her speech of resentment, “I am not going to speak to him, anyway—the old rascal,” Anne begged earnestly, “May, do it *this once!* I haven’t got time to tell you *why*, but I will when we have passed him,” whispering the last, for he was then within hearing.

Under compulsion, almost, May bowed stiffly as he passed, his tall, spare figure bent, his eyes on the ground except for a fleeting glance up at the girls and a guttural sound that might pass for a greeting. It was all in great contrast to the erect carriage and courtly manner of the Colonel a few years previous. But Anne

had smiled most pleasantly, and said, "Good morning, Colonel," just as she had always done since a little child.

"How could you?" exclaimed May, as soon as they were out of hearing. "You just *made* me bow, but I certainly wouldn't speak to him!"

Anne laughed light-heartedly. "Well, I'll tell you, May. It's mother, of course, at the bottom of it. I felt just like you do—only worse; I positively hated him, till mother showed me how much it costs anybody to hate another, and, since then, I have seen enough myself to find that she is right. This morning, for instance, we were walking along, enjoying everything in spite of our troubles, then Colonel Thompson came in sight, and if we hated him, everything was gone—all the nice morning—our 'glad morning faces,' as mother says Stevenson puts it,—and,

you know, we girls do love to look pretty, whatever comes or goes! Besides, we were talking about such happy, interesting things, and we would just have had to drop it all and talk about how *mean* he is, and *hate* him till we felt positively hateful ourselves. Honestly, May, I've found out for myself this month that it does not pay. I would never have thought anything about it if it had not been for mother, but I promised her right at once that I would try her way, and now I know it is the happiest. Colonel Thompson has robbed us, that is true, but that is no reason why we should let him rob us any more—of the gladness of any day that comes.”

And Anne, in passing on the teaching of her mother, grew herself in earnest conviction, after the manner of teachers, while May found hate losing its grip upon

her in a really comfortable fashion. "Mother is so wonderful in her way of looking at things," she said pleasantly at last.

"Yes," returned Anne, "but she says she has tried hate and knows all about it."

"It's hard to think that of mother," laughed May, "but really, Anne, since I've come to think of it, it must take lots of energy to hate folks; you must have to plunge in and go to work at it often when you don't feel a bit like exerting yourself. You know I am lazy," she added comfortably, "about everything but reading or study. I felt tired all over when Colonel Thompson had passed, and you put my mind on something else, letting me relax."

The two laughed together at themselves, and though they did not know it, at the foolishness of humanity which vexes and frets and wears its soul out in re-

sentment and revenge, which always cost the giver more than the receiver.

"Mother thinks of more quaint things," said Anne. "She claims there is good in every one, and that we should always try to bring it out. We were talking yesterday, you know, about the rusty old pine needles that did not seem to have any possibility of good in them,—and yet they can be made into beautiful baskets; and the old china-berries, which seemed just made to smell unpleasantly, but can be transformed into lovely necklaces. Colonel Thompson, she says, may show he has a spark of something beautiful in him yet, and we may help to develop it."

"Well, that is beyond me," said May with girlish finality; "I'm willing to try, not to hate him, but that is all I am going to have to do with him."

"I'm afraid I feel that way, too,"

laughed Anne. "We'll have to leave the rest to mother. She reminded me, in talking about this, that we are a Blossom Shop family and must raise flowers and not weeds, but she'll always have to do the finest part of the Blossom Shop family jobs, I guess."

And they went on in their walk, never suspecting that they had turned a corner in life and were facing the sun which is so necessary for choicest blooming, and which scorches the dank weeds of hate.

Next day May took the train for South Carolina where she began her work as teacher.

CHAPTER VI

GENE IN THE MOUNTAINS

AUNT Martha, Uncle Doctor and Gene Carter Grey were meantime having a most interesting time in the mountain region of Alabama. In their first ascents they were delighted with the beautiful ferns along sheltered streams,—nothing could be prettier in the finest florist shops; and wild flowers, even in mid-winter, were peeping out from moss covered stones here and there to delight, but they found much in the way of human growth or non-growth, that was almost unbelievable. Keeping near the towns for hotel accommodation at first, they gradually

learned of places to stop further within the mountain fastnesses; and, while this meant discomfort, it also meant unusual experiences. They came upon little log huts in the woods with only one room and swarms of white-haired, scantily-clad, sober-faced children who gazed upon them wide-eyed as they drove up. And Gene soon found exquisite pleasure in putting dolls into little hands that reached for them in sudden awakening of the universal child-instinct which had kept them yearning for they knew not what, but which found satisfaction instantly at sight of a doll. Then there were little wagons and horses tucked in their phaëton for the boys, and the three felt the thrills of traveling Santa Clauses.

“This is something like,” said the doctor with great satisfaction, as they drove away from a cabin, leaving each child in

dazed delight, "but I'm afraid we will forget all about blind children in this charming business of putting something before eyes that can see and have only earth and trees and sky to look at. Nature is all right, of course, but these people are just buried in it, and that is too much of a good thing. Don't know how to read, write, or live! What are we doing that we let folks exist like this?"

And the more they penetrated the mountains, the more astonished they were to find continually a people that did not even know how to raise articles for food. They had no gardens or crops, except corn, and no cows or chickens; only hogs that lazily wallowed beneath high-set cabins and furnished the bacon, which, with the corn hoe-cake, made up their total bill of fare.

Aunt Martha could not cease her ex-

clamations. With her thrifty, immaculate New England ways, she could not comprehend such a people. At first she protested, "They could do better—they are simply lazy," but as she felt more and more the oppression of mountain solitude and isolation, she exclaimed, "It is uncanny! Let us leave it all or I shall revert, myself, to primitive conditions!"

At this Uncle Doctor and Gene laughed, but it was oppressive, and the giving of toys to the children, after the sight of their joy had faded, seemed only a mockery.

"Let's go back and find some way to help them," said Gene, and having found and made arrangements for several children who were blind, or nearly so, to be sent to the sanatorium for treatment, all gladly stopped at a big iron ore plant where there was a rude boarding-house,

which could accommodate them for a few days.

A big furnace was the center of the plant, where iron ore, being industriously gathered now from the surrounding mountains, was converted into pig iron. It was an interesting spot for all, but especially for Gene, who, with the eagerness of youth, wanted to see how such things were done.

At their first dinner in the boarding-house a young man came in whom they knew instantly did not belong to the region. The doctor looked keenly at the young man while he bowed to them in a general way as he seated himself—a courtesy which fitted well into the rude setting.

He was strongly built, of medium height and broad shoulders; his face was clean-cut, earnest and intelligent; his

broad forehead and soft brown hair, his well-shaped, but recently hardened hands, showed refinement, and his demeanor at table marked him a gentleman. Quickly appraising, the doctor entered into conversation with him, and learned that he and his brother were proprietors of the big iron furnace, and had been operating it for about a year. There was a little grimness in this last statement that the doctor failed to detect, and the young man proved so pleasant and intelligent that the doctor soon included his wife and Gene in the conversation, without introducing them to the stranger, social conformity dropping from the consciousness of all in the crude surroundings.

"Where is your home?" inquired Aunt Martha frankly.

"Kentucky," returned the young man pleasantly. "I am from Louisville, and

come from a race of lawyers, but my brother and I wanted to get out into the open, and we trained for this sort of work at the University of Pennsylvania. A little legacy made this opening possible for us, and we came down and bought the abandoned furnace here a year ago."

He was thus frank for it was so good to be in touch with his own kind once more, and the sight of Gene's fair face and clear, lovely eyes was like an oasis to a thirsty desert traveler. He just wanted to talk to her instantly—Oh, how long it had been since he talked to a girl! He never had "run after" girls, he would have said, but the thought of talking to one now made him positively hungry, and he envied the veriest idler who could pose on the street corners and see them every day at home. He paved the way at once with the facts about himself. Then he must

go to let his brother come for dinner, but took time to return with him a moment that he might be introduced to the new-found friends.

"This is my brother," he said, putting an arm about the shoulders that were not quite so big or broad as his own, but which held erect a shock of brilliant red hair crowning a well-shaped head, "George Chauncy Griffith. My name is Willard Chauncy Griffith,"—he added, smiling. "I want to share with him this greatest treat which has fallen to my lot in many moons—this meeting with pleasant company—and I do assure you he is a first-rate fellow!" The doctor then followed with the giving of his own name and the presenting of his wife and Gene formally.

Lifting his hat, the older young man was gone at once, while George took his place at table. The three lingered to talk

with him. He proved not quite so ready in manner, but had a boyish frankness that won them, while he told much that was interesting about the mountain people and their surroundings.

In the evening after supper they sat about the blazing log fire in the broad fireplace of the dining-room, for the crude boarding-house furnished no parlor, and the two young men reveled in the companionship of "their kind of folks," as they put it to each other, later.

It happened that the older young man, Willard, sat nearest to Gene, and they finally fell into individual talk, while George interested the doctor and his wife with further account of the mountains and their people.

Gene had seen the tall, gaunt building which held the furnace and its immense smoke stack, and she was interested at

once in the processes of iron making. With all her flower-like delicacy, Gene had a very alert comprehension for practical things. Her New England grandfather had made his money as a manufacturer; and, though Gene did not know it as yet, the constructive and commercial held strong interest for her. She wanted Mr. Griffith to tell her all about digging the ore, smelting it and bringing it forth in pig iron.

"You must see the furnace make a run," said Willard, delighted by her alert grasp of everything he had told her. Then a shadow passed over his face as his heart sounded an old alarm—"It may be the last run it will make."

But the shadow did not catch Gene's eyes, and Willard warmed again to her questions.

"When are you going to make the next

one?" She had discovered already that "runs" were not made every day.

"I think we will be ready to make one to-morrow night," he replied.

"Oh, won't that be splendid!" she cried.

"It is a fine sight," returned Willard.

It was soon time to separate for the night, and when they met next day at dinner it was almost as old friends, the home-longing young fellows had so reached out for and won the kindly comradeship of all three.

The doctor had said to his wife the night before: "I think I know something about the human kind, and those two young fellows are all right. Clean, high-minded, well-born, ambitious boys. I hope they will succeed in their big undertaking, and I think they will, for they work,—you can see that."

"Yes," replied his wife, "and I like

their putting the legacy they received at once into the way of making more, instead of spending it, as many young men would have done."

The two Griffiths were up long before the travelers had their breakfast, so the parties did not meet in the morning.

Again the young men were at the dinner table one at a time, for one must "stay by the stuff," as Willard put it, while the other ate.

The chief topic of interest was the "run" of the furnace for the night. Willard was sure they would have it, in fact was pushing everything in order to do so for the entertainment of the new friends.

At supper Willard was not there, but George came over for a hasty meal and took the three visitors back with him.

After a short walk the furnace loomed big and black against the quiet sky of the

solitary mountain region, and seemed an anachronism with its belching smoke and busy night-workmen. There was something weird about it to Gene's delicate sensibilities, but Willard met them at the entrance with business-like alertness, a lantern in his hand, and said, "Now you must go first up to the top and see the big beast's open mouth."

"Oh, you make me shiver," said Gene, and laughing, he took her hand, laid it on his arm in a matter-of-fact sort of assurance, and led the way along a narrow passage to the far interior of the building; there they mounted some very precarious stairs, as they seemed to Gene, and climbed up and up into grim darkness, the doctor and Miss Martha following, being piloted by George, also with a lantern. All reached the top in safety, and watched from the weird height while workmen

shoveled the ore from a broad platform into the great round stack which Willard had called the beast's mouth. There was so much noise that they could only stand silent as they watched, and Gene's sense of uncanniness almost over-balanced her keen interest in the proceeding, so she really was glad when Willard turned to go down the narrow stairs again.

Next they went into the big main hall of the building, and there the great flaming fire was greedily licking in the coal that was fed it by sweltering workmen. Again they all watched silently amid the noise of shoveling coal and roaring heat. Then Willard and George pointed out to them the great beds of sand with narrow paths running through them in regular patterns, where the molten stream of iron would find its way, when all was ready, and congeal again in proper shape.

They continued to watch the work under the fierce flame-light, which lit the high rude beams above with ruddy playing flare.

"Any moment it is due now," said Willard at last in Gene's ear—and suddenly there was a shout, while workmen ran to safety.

Then the molten stream poured like a great, flaming, hissing serpent from out the fiery cauldron, and came with fierce, consuming heat down the pathway and into the narrow patterns through the sand, with a sulphurous light that was weird and beautiful in the highest degree.

They were forced back by the heat to seats far in the rear, which Willard and George had provided, and there watched further while the flaming pattern lines dimmed in their brilliance, then grew dull, and finally duller, till the fiery spec-

tacle had faded like a passing meteor.

"So ends the whole thing," said Willard to Gene, in sudden depression which she could not fail to catch, while George was animatedly explaining processes to the doctor and Aunt Martha.

"What do you mean?" the girl asked, with quick sympathetic inquiry.

"Just that," he said grimly. Then he turned to her with a half smile. "To use a very crude expression, that seems to fit these surroundings and our condition, George and I, I am afraid, have 'bit off more than we can chew!' This outfit cost a good deal—which we were able to meet all right, but running the thing takes more capital than we supposed, and I don't know that we can squeeze out another run!"

"Oh," said Gene, "that must not be!" And there was almost pain in the sensitive

face, so quick was her response to the trouble in his.

Seeing it, Willard instantly pulled himself together. What right had he to inflict his financial distress upon any one, much less this fair young girl who was so evidently made for the beautiful and prosperous things of life?

"Oh, I have thought that before and yet made it once again," he said, "and so I will keep on doing as long as there is a ghost of a chance, and the old furnace will yield a spark of flame."

And his lips set firmly while he took up some interesting technicalities of the run which they had just seen. Then, as they walked back to the boarding-house, he talked animatedly of his plans for the work in a broad way. He wanted to have a little church spire rising from a grassy knoll which he pointed out, and a school

house close by, where he hoped to gather in the children of their workmen, whom they drew from the mountains largely, and who could neither read nor write, and whose children had no chance whatever for education unless the furnace interest brought it to them. Then he would have baths for the men, and a reading-room, and numberless things had been planned which enlisted Gene's enthusiastic interest.

As they neared the house he said: "Miss Grey, please do not think too much of my discouragement at the run. I am going to try to get away after a bit, perhaps, and see if I cannot enlist some capital at home. George and I have really too much to do. The mountaineers whom we employ know absolutely nothing, and many of them are lazy—simply because they have not for generations been trained to work.

He must watch them constantly while they mine the ore, and I must spend every minute at the furnace itself. We need a man to manage the business end of it."

There they said good night, and Gene felt much easier about the young men and their venture.

Next morning there was a good deal of forwarded mail for the travelers, and Gene eagerly tore open a letter from her mother as she, Uncle Doctor and Aunt Martha sat together. With a warm glow upon her face she read the first few lines, saying how they all were. Then the color went out of her cheeks, and she finally laid the letter down with a catch in her breath and startled fear in her eyes.

Aunt Martha saw it instantly. "Why, what is it, Gene?" she exclaimed.

"Oh, read it—I can't tell you," she an-

swered, in distress, handing out the letter.

Aunt Martha read in haste, and equally distressed, learned of the disastrous financial losses of Mr. Carter.

The doctor anxiously waited his turn to know and Aunt Martha handed him the letter without a word. When he was through, he said with characteristic optimism, "It probably is not nearly so bad as you think. I guarantee Carter gets out of it all right."

But Gene knew her mother was not given to exaggeration, so did Aunt Martha, and with the first remembrance in detail from the letter smiting her afresh—"Anne must give up her wedding plans and help in the matter of our daily living for a time," Gene exclaimed:

"Can we go home right away—today?"

Seeing the urgency in the girl's face,

the doctor answered, "Why, yes, we can, if you wish."

"I say so, too," cried Aunt Martha. They must get there at once and see for themselves—and *help*, Gene and Aunt Martha were both crying in their hearts. "We have plenty of money, why should those we love lack for anything?"

But the doctor understood men better than they did, and knew in the moment of his discovery of Mr. Carter's financial straits, that he would not take money help from any one.

So, it was with a heavy heart, wholly unlike the big, jolly member to which they were accustomed, that the doctor made plans for getting off. He felt a depressing surety that the eager, helpful intentions of his wife and Gene were doomed to disappointment.

When the two young Griffiths came,

in turn, to dinner, they were surprised and no little disappointed to find that their new friends were going at once. No hint was given, of course, of sudden trouble. They had concluded it was best from some letters just received that they make their way back to civilization.

"I don't blame you for doing that," said Willard with a smile, "but I do hope you will come again when my model workman's village has spread itself upon this dreary mountain canvas."

He said it to all, but his eyes sought Gene's for encouragement.

She was quickly responsive. Looking frankly back in return, she said warmly:

"We will, for I know you are going to bring it all to pass in good time."

"Thank you," his eyes again said; "that is going to make me do it, if anything can."

CHAPTER VII

A REPULSED PHILANTHROPIST

AS the three travelers approached the Carter home unannounced, Gene, who was a bit ahead, had the feeling of awe which is felt at an approach to the house of death. In her thought a shadow hovered over everything; unnatural silence brooded; the magnolias, citronellas and wild olives drooped uncertainly, to her anxious eyes, while the flowering almond, just coming into soft blossom, seemed to be making a pitiful, unsuccessful effort. When she turned into the gate and went along the walk to the house, past

rioting yellow jonquils, many-hued hyacinths and fragrant purple violets, her spirits rose a little, there was no mistaking the evidence of happy thrift here, and before they reached the front door, Anne, industriously sweeping the front porch, looked up and spied them.

“Oh, oh!” she cried, and the broom found sudden lodgement against a porch pillar while she flew down the steps to meet her sister, all radiant youth and spirits.

They rushed together, and Gene could only cling to Anne, and cry, with a little break in her voice, “Is—is everything all right?”

“Why, of course it is,” returned Anne, laughing. “‘God is in His heaven—all’s right with the world!’”

With an English lover, Anne had inevitably fallen upon Browning with avid-

ity long since, and nothing came readier to her tongue. Besides, Browning had been the "family poet-laureate" of Donald and his mother, as they had come to put it when they were children, just as Emily Dickinson had been the Carters', and she had prepared for a union of the two—some day!

Then joyous Anne flew on to meet the doctor and Aunt Martha, who were just turning in at the gate.

Aunt Martha held her with unusual tenderness, but the doctor, after a quick kiss, forced her off at arm's length, and searched the fair face which, by then, held a mist of tears before the laughter. But she met his search with eyes that shone bravely through the mist, and he drew her to him a moment to give her respite, while he cried softly, "True blue, just as I thought! I tell you these South-

ern blossoms are all right—no fading tints in *them!*”

And they went slowly up the walk together, asking and answering questions, while Gene had run with light step into the house in search of her mother. The meeting with Anne had dispelled many shadowing fancies, and she was full of joy of meeting that loved mother.

It was not long till the two were in each other's arms, and they were left for a little time alone.

“Mother—how are you-all?” cried Gene, again remembering, but this time with cheerier note.

“We are just as well as can be, little girl—‘the hills untie their bonnets’ and ‘the bobolinks begin,’ with the rising of the sun, just as they used to when you were all children,” she smiled, going back to the little Emily Dickinson poem which

they had loved so in the early days of struggle, and Gene's last bit of shadow flitted back for the time being, at least, into the night's past gloom.

There was happy greeting then, all around, and soon a little visit out to Uncle Sam's cabin, where in gradually increasing feebleness he kept his bed most of the time now. Both he and Mammy Sue were proud and pleased to be remembered so promptly.

They went to the library and sat down for talk of the travelers' experiences in the mountains and were much entertained, though Anne soon slipped out to make her preparations for the noon meal, and Mr. Carter came in later to greet them with all the warmth that a thoroughly dissipated man could muster. He looked so worn and old, so utterly unlike himself, that Gene felt the shadows drop

suddenly about her again, and the doctor had to utilize all his store of quaint humor in the recounting of recent experiences to restore the normal atmosphere of that most hospitable of homes, and this itself might have failed had not Murton Grey come in at meal-time and contributed eager questions about mountain things with alert, boyish interest.

It was the next day before Gene and her mother had an opportunity for the talk for which Gene was most eager. She had meant to speak to Mr. Carter, but that was impossible, she knew, the moment she looked into his face. She could never say what she wanted to, to him, without quivering lips—even if he were willing to listen to her—and this she instinctively doubted now.

After the morning work was done, with which Gene insisted upon helping her

mother and Anne, they sat down, at last, in Mrs. Carter's room and Gene began at once.

"Now, mother, you know I must help you-all in this trouble which has come. Why didn't you send for me at once?" she ended reproachfully.

The mother smiled back and waited several moments before she spoke. "Gene, you must be the little girl—even the little *blind* daughter once more" (she almost whispered this), "and trust mother absolutely! It is not going to be possible for you to help us—except to love us, just as you always have done!"

"But—oh, mother," she cried, "you cannot be so cruel—you will not make me have everything and you nothing!" And it ended with a sob.

There followed the most trying experience between mother and daughter of all

their lives, but in the end Mrs. Carter convinced Gene that she must let them meet the struggle, which was somehow meant for them, without money-help from any one,—even if she could not see the reasons. There was just one last, firm stand on Gene's part before final, forced capitulation.

Why couldn't she give Anne her trousseau, and let her be married at the expected time?

"Mother, I think that is only justice to Anne and Donald. They have waited patiently till he was ready—and now they ought not to have to suffer for Colonel Thompson's dishonesty!"

The mother smiled at the heated mention of their spoiler, as she had with the other two girls, and said, "We haven't anything to do with Colonel Thompson in this matter—we have all agreed not to

think of him—Mr. Carter obligated himself of his own free will—it is a debt, and he must pay it—no one else—we certainly do not want to imitate Colonel Thompson in that—and we, Anne and I, are going to help till everything gets in better shape for Mr. Carter.”

“And you cut me off from helping—just as though I didn’t belong,” said Gene with eyes blazing a bit, and quivering lips.

“Oh, no, you are going to help,—didn’t you, this morning, help us with everything we were doing?”

This was mockery, though Mrs. Carter was too much in earnest to see it.

Gene turned away from her mother for the first time in her life, and went out unreconciled, though obliged to conform.

She at once sought Uncle Doctor and

Aunt Martha, and told them of her failure to do *one thing!*

“It is just as I thought,” said the doctor brusquely. “I didn’t want to dishearten you two on the trip, but I knew Carter wouldn’t take money from either of you—and I am bound to say I admire him for it. He made a mistake in putting his name to any paper for any amount which he was not quite prepared to pay; he knows it, and like the true man that he is, he wants to pay the debt, if it takes all he has, and then work out his problem instead of being supported by some one else, and we must give him time. He has not yet had opportunity to find himself, he says; he will, as soon as possible, arrange to pay off the debt fully, and then will turn to something, if it must be buying a little farm on credit, and working to pay for it while he raises a crop and provides a living for his

family. As for Anne, she has met it all nobly; every day that passes is making her finer and finer," he ended, with enthusiasm for his old favorite, Anne.

But this did not satisfy Gene. She went to her own room much downcast in spirit under life's first clouds. She sat disconsolately by the window listless and unseeing.

Mammy Sue came to the door, after a while, to lay some fresh linen on the bed; remembering Uncle Sam, the girl turned and asked dully, "How is Uncle Sam, this morning, Mammy Sue?"

The answer was of even more leaden hue:

"He's sinkin' fas', Miss Gene, hit won't be long twell the trump' will soun' fer him," and the old woman did not trust herself to say more. She turned and left with feeble step.

“Oh, the world is nothing but trouble,” this young girl cried out in her heart, with youth and beauty and more money than she knew what to do with at her command!

In deep depression she went over all the sorrowful present—and somehow, recollection came of Willard Griffith’s grim: “So ends the whole thing,” as they watched the dying brilliance of the run, which might be his last, and this phrase was destined to linger as an undercurrent of haunting pessimism.

CHAPTER VIII

BUSY DAYS

AS soon as her school was out the day after the travelers had arrived, Cahaba was at the Carters'. She had heard of the visitors' coming, appeared unannounced in the kitchen, and was busy at work there when Anne went in to begin her preparations for the evening meal.

"What are you doing here, Cahaba?" cried Anne, surprised.

"Just getting supper," returned Cahaba calmly, proceeding with her work.

"But, you know we told you, you couldn't do it."

"I ain't doing it for you," said the girl

quietly and without intended impertinence, mixing up dough for beaten biscuits with great energy. Beaten biscuit were something they did not have much these trying days and they were a delicacy of which the doctor was especially fond. "I'm a doing it for the doctor and Miss Martha. I reckon I can be allowed to work for them while they are here. If I should get down on my knees before 'em and stay there for the rest of my days I couldn't pay 'em for what they've done for me." And there was reason and decision in Cahaba's speech that could not be easily put aside. There was a red plaid handkerchief tied tightly upon her head in the old-time negro way to emphasize her intention to serve.

"Well," said Anne, weakening, "I don't know what mother will say—"

"She won't say nothing—if you go on

and tell her I'm here and I am going to stay! With so much company in the house, and Uncle Sam so sick, I *ought* to be here—and if you get rid of me it'll have to be by sending me to the calaboose!" And she didn't add that her appetite was not going to be good, but so she had determined.

There was simply no withstanding such firmness. Anne laughed and went to tell mother.

Mrs. Carter laughed too, as Anne described Cahaba's insurrection, and said, "We will let her stay. She does feel very grateful to Aunt Martha for her education, and must be glad of this opportunity to show it. Besides, they will only be here a day or two. They feel it is not the time to visit us just now, and will soon be returning East."

"Oh, I am so sorry," said Anne. "I

love to have them here, and I don't mind the extra work. Is Gene going with them?" she ended.

"No," replied Mrs. Carter with a troubled look. "Gene says she is going to stay right here and wash dishes and cook and sweep as long as we do."

"She ought not to do it," Anne returned. "She had all her plans made to go East for the summer for a good rest and outing before her university work next year, and there is no reason why she should take up our burdens."

"I know," said the mother, "but she will."

This trouble was proving many-sided and very perplexing to this mother who strove always to see the wise way for those dependent upon her guiding. But underneath it all was secret joy that Gene, in spite of her wealth, was thoroughly

identified with them, ready to share anything that came, and, denied the privilege of handing out money to meet their needs, could yet help with her hands.

Capable Cahaba in the kitchen was an immense relief to Mrs. Carter and Anne. She came early in the morning, prepared the breakfast, and had everything in readiness for dinner that was possible to prepare beforehand. Then she hurried away to her school, to return at the earliest moment after school was over.

"How do you get here so early afternoons?" inquired Anne, for she knew Cahaba used to be a great deal later in getting home.

Cahaba laughed. "I'm teaching with my eyes shut for a while. I don't see a thing that goes wrong, and whenever I *can*, I *imagines* they make the right answers. You see, there has always been

dead oodles of little nigs to be kept in every day—" Cahaba relaxed as usual in grammar and little niceties of speech being "at home," which was a great mental relief for her. "Now I don't keep nary one in! But, won't I give it to 'em after 'while? Judgement day's coming for them, shore, 'fore long! I'm jes' white-washing 'em, and sprinkling 'em with sugar and frying 'em in butter *now*—but lawsy—I'll skin 'em after 'while!"

The "little nigs," however, wouldn't have been greatly frightened could they have seen Cahaba's dancing eyes and heard Anne's ringing laughter.

The help from Cahaba gave time, not only for more enjoyment of the doctor and Aunt Martha, but also for some other things which must be done at once. The Cape jessamines were already putting forth leaves and very tiny buds were be-

ginning to show. There were beautiful long rows of bushes in the Blossom Shop yard, for it had been kept as a Cape jessamine garden. They must send out circulars to Northern and Eastern florists to make ready for the marketing of this crop. The first thing to be decided was, "What should be their firm name?" Anne wanted to be at the head of the business.

"Why wasn't I given a boy's name, like you, Gene?" she complained. "'Eugene Grey and Co.' always sounded fine."

The two girls were talking over the question, as they sat on the front porch steps after a walk.

Gene laughed, "Didn't it, though? And mother and I were addressed as 'Sirs!' And I never will forget what scary letters we got sometimes, when we were learning and they pitched into us about something that we had done wrong,

just as though we were men! And they never dreamed that a little blind girl was head of the firm and mother was the company!"

Her childish glee over this had not been revived for many a day, and, renewing her interest in the old business, Gene forgot for the time her keen resentment over present denials, and put her thought upon the question of a firm-name for Anne's business.

It must be "The Blossom Shop," of course, it was finally decided. This title must head the circular, and then the firm-name must come underneath. Both girls had on their "studying-caps."

"How would 'A. N. Carter & Co.' do?" asked Gene, uncertainly, at last.

"Why—fine!" cried Anne. "It would be Anne Carter all right, though somewhat abbreviated, which she is—her frills

are about all gone," she laughed, and then regretted it the next moment, as a shadow settled quickly upon Gene's face and would not lift again. Anne herself was not dwelling in shadows by any means; constant letters from Donald, strong, fine, more splendid than they had ever been, kept her glowing. The doctor might well talk about their letters plowing the ocean now—"We keep it in a constant state of foam," she often whispered exuberantly to herself.

Trying to ignore Gene's shadow, she laughed again and said gayly: "I wish I could put in about the pine needles, china-berries and chincapins—but I suppose I can't mix up things like that," and then she flew in to her mother to submit the suggestion for a firm-name and found hearty approval.

"But you must add underneath the

firm-name: 'Successors to Eugene Grey & Co.,' for this will be endorsement for you, as the old firm stood well with the dealers," said Mrs. Carter with a bit of pride.

So it was settled, after approval from Uncle Doctor and Aunt Martha. The firm's title was not shown to Mr. Carter, for they knew that would hurt, and the order for cards, paper and envelopes was made ready at once for the printer. Thus the old flower business was renewed under the new firm name, and orders came in promptly from former customers of "Eugene Grey & Co.," after the sending out of cards. Gene insisted on remaining to help till the Cape jessamine season was past and May returned from her teaching in time to help, as well.

Uncle Doctor and Aunt Martha reluctantly left the family for a return to their

sanatorium work in the North, and to a more pleasant summer climate for them.

The three girls, with youth and health and the habit of joy fixed upon them, did not fail to get much fun along with their work and Anne did not fail to weave much romance about the beautiful blossoms and glossy green leaves as they picked and packed them each day. For May it was "the professor," whom she always saw paying court, but to these insinuations May returned emphatic denial: "He has forgotten that I exist by this time! Because you have a wedding in prospect you are always seeing romance when there isn't any, Anne!"

For Gene it was Willard Griffith who linked himself with the rosy future as Anne saw it. She had noticed a certain easy flushing when Gene happened to mention his name as she referred to some-

thing that occurred during their stay at the mountains, but Gene would protest: "Anne, you are perfectly ridiculous!" So the two mockingly dubbed her "Romantic Anne" and "Romance Expert."

"Well," Anne protested calmly in return, "delayed romance within me must work out some way, I suppose."

And the mother smiled over the three in their youth as they lingered at the wonderful crossroads of life, looking beyond with assurance, speculation and many finalities that would need future undoing.

Then came a pleasant episode one bright June morning as the girls sat at work in the Blossom Shop,—which was wearing its title quite literally now,—when Mrs. Carter brought over to them most unexpectedly Professor Addison Humphrey Vernon in person. There

was a natural flutter of surprised greeting from the girls that did not lack in cordial hospitality, however, and the professor's quiet eyes in return twinkled with pleasure at the unusual scene.

"We are deep in the toils of business, you see," May managed to say, with pretty heightened color, feeling that, as the one most acquainted, she must be spokesman.

"Well," exclaimed the professor, "I must say, if this is business, it is in the most sublimated, fragrant, beautiful and altogether delightful form I have ever encountered it." And he still stood while in his slow, easy way he took in each detail before him: the three busy attractive girls, the boxes of white bloom and green leaf filling rapidly under their deft fingers from the mass of sprays in huge bowls or lying loose upon the tables be-

fore them, claiming several minutes indeed, for this before he seated himself in their midst, and even then his twinkling eyes played over the scene constantly and the expressive mouth was dominated by unusual satisfaction. It was all so unconscious on his part that no one was embarrassed and Anne laughed in answer to him:

"It is real business, nevertheless. We own right up that we are greedy for the dollars that we expect in return for these beauties."

"Isn't it a shame," exclaimed the professor again vigorously, "that everything comfortable, beautiful or intellectual has to be mixed up more or less with money?" And the serious corner of his mouth threatened to dominate. Then he followed the thought in his mind in a way he was quite apt to do, letting the listener

wait to find connecting links. "The small college is at once the hope and glory of the South and yet it is throttled continually with the need of money. Ours is no exception, and money-raising in the sordid, ordinary sense isn't at all to my taste. But this method appeals to me!" And his mouth was curved to broad pleasure lines again.

"Couldn't I enlist this firm to teach me their methods, Mrs. Carter," he said; whereupon the girls gayly enlightened him not only as to the possibilities of Cape jessamines, but also of chincapins, china-berries and pine needles, until business, under their portrayal, became a very gleeful affair.

At last the professor in turn enlightened them further along his line of thought by saying, "This is the fertile valley of joy and consummation, in delight-

ful contrast to the barren mountain heights I have just been investigating. Some land up in the mountain region of your state was left to our college a number of years ago; and, hearing that a furnace and mining ore business was in full blast there, I went up to see if I could not sell out to them, as there is undoubtedly coal and iron ore both in the land."

Gene dropped the flower spray she was wrapping in moist cotton and gazed with sudden intuitive intentness into his face.

"What furnace," she managed to ask at last.

"The Griffith plant, it is called," he returned, and there was a murmur of surprise all round, while Mrs. Carter hastened to explain, telling how they came to know the plant.

"Fine young fellows, those Griffiths," the professor said, then added with a

whimsical smile, "but, like the rest of us, throttled by the need of money. They want the land, need it badly, but haven't the money to pay for it."

Gene listened with strained consciousness and rebellious heart. Everybody needed money but her. She had it and could not do anything she wanted to with it!

Professor Vernon remained to dinner with them, taking the evening train to a nearby town where there were some prospective students for his school.

With the involuntary morning exchange of confidences over the struggles of life Anne had gathered the professor into her warm heart, while her observant eyes took note of several things, among them that Professor Vernon gave no evidence of having forgotten May's existence.

The three girls continued their daily work until with every Cape jessamine gathered, packed and shipped from their own yard and from the Blossom Shop of the starry bloom, there was a goodly sum added to the family account, and Mrs. Carter finally convinced Gene that it was due to her uncle and aunt to go to them for at least a couple of months, which she reluctantly did.

"There won't be any more business till chincapins and china-berries come on in the fall, then I'll telegraph you the moment they are ready for the turning into gold and from gold into—well, we won't say now, but probably into good bread and butter," promised Anne.

So Gene went away, and the hottest summer days went by for the Carter household without need for effort except the daily one of preparing meals and at-

tending to the necessary housework for Cahaba had been again dismissed. This work was not easy for the two girls and their mother who were unaccustomed to it, but they did it cheerfully, while Anne did not relax any in the rapid line of letters that continued to cross the ocean. Uncle Sam still lingered in feebleness and Mammy Sue was almost completely occupied with him, though she still insisted on doing some of the family wash each week. The girls did the rest. At first they marveled despairingly how the colored folks ever made ruffles and tucks and embroidery look so fine in the washing and ironing, and then they grew interested in the process, and the development of their own skill.

"Why, we are getting to be perfect artists, Anne," May exclaimed gleefully at last over the ironing board one hot

July day. "I had no idea there was real art in the thing, before. Hereafter, though, I will have due respect for perfect laundry work, and I certainly won't muss up things any more than I need to," as she wiped her dripping face.

"I am learning to do so many things," laughed Anne, as she also dripped and wiped, "that if Donald was going to buy me, as men have to buy their wives in some countries, father would certainly be able to raise the price."

"That is true, Anne," returned the mother, looking on. "I have found in my experience that no knowledge of various kinds of work is without value. You are simply getting finer and finer every day for Donald," she ended affectionately, which in her heart was a broader statement than appeared in words.

CHAPTER IX

SUNSET FOR UNCLE SAM

SEPTEMBER was at hand and it happened that Gene did not have to await Anne's promised summons. The truth was that she had not been able to forget how hard they were working in the summer heat at home. Somehow, too, the heat of that mountain furnace mingled with the Southern depressing warmth in her thought, and the ebbing brilliance of the dying "run" with Willard Griffith's "So ends the whole thing," continued to make lamenting refrain for her inner consciousness. So the cool, bracing breezes

which played about Aunt Martha's stately, beautiful New England home, could not woo her into oblivion, and her sweet girlish face took on a still-seriousness that was like the sudden droop of a budding rose. Uncle Doctor and Aunt Martha watched her with constant concern. They consulted together many times, and finally, the last of August, the doctor made an unexpected proposition to the girl.

"Gene, what do you say to a run down South for a visit before school begins for you and May?"

"Oh, Uncle Doctor, you are the dearest thing in the world," she cried for answer, her face blooming again with the sudden inner radiance.

That was indeed what the girl wanted. This settled the matter entirely for Aunt Martha in spite of the fact she had ar-

gued among other things that the heat was yet too trying for Southern travel, and that really they could do nothing to help matters when they were there. "That is true," the doctor had returned to this, "but we want to keep our eyes upon those unreasonable Southern folks some way—it may be that some of them will come to their senses and let us help them, and we want to be at hand if they do."

"Doctor, how you talk!" Aunt Martha had exclaimed, but she laughed as well, and was quite as anxious as he to have a hand in straightening out the Carters' finances.

A few days later found them steaming lazily into the old station again with the sultry September hush upon the little town, but the girls and their mother with Murton Grey were there to meet them

and there was joy all round at being together again.

Next day, with the excitement of arrival and greetings past, there was keen stock-taking, so to speak, of one another. Mrs. Carter noticed the lingering paleness of Gene's cheeks, and Gene in turn could detect with worried eyes the effects of the past months of strain upon her mother; but she strove this time not to let it appear, for had not Uncle Doctor and Aunt Martha brought her down a month ahead of the time they expected, or wanted to come, simply because they knew it was her desire? And it was happier to be with those she loved than to be away from them, if she had to worry about them wherever she was, came as a summing up of her philosophy for the time being. She tried once more, however, to induce her mother to let her help

in a money way until Mr. Carter became established in some new business, but the mother only shook her head, for she could not tell her daughter how much Mr. Carter's dispirited attitude made her anxious lest he never recover himself in a business way, and so they must learn to manage for themselves as quickly as possible. It was true that he had not yet had time to complete the turning of his property into cash that he might settle Colonel Thompson's debt, but the anxiety of women will run ahead of events and seize upon calamity aforetime.

It was several weeks before frost would fall and the shining brown chincapins were ready to gather and ship, and still more weeks before china-berries attained the proper point of yellow-brown perfection suitable for beginning their transformation into necklaces. Cahaba was

promptly again in the kitchen upon the arrival of the guests from the East, and it was good to have her there, especially since it was very evident that Uncle Sam, who had unexpectedly survived the summer, had only a little time now to linger. Mammy Sue must give her whole time to him, and nourishment for him and food for her must be supplied each day. The September hush grew in intensity for them all as they went in and out the cabin ministering to the needs of the old couple, watching the ebbing life. And each time the old man must murmur his blessing upon them:

“De good Lord mek his sun to shine on yo’ all twell it grow to de perfec’ day,” and the perfect day was already lighting those dim old eyes.

The doctor said, as they walked away one morning, “If ever a soul was white—

ready for the shining city, I think it must be that one which has lived its earthly life under a black cover."

"You are certainly right, doctor," returned Mrs. Carter, "if a life of absolute unselfishness is the test."

It was the evening of that day when the doctor came in from a visit to the old man again and said that Uncle Sam wanted to tell good-by to everybody, and all went sorrowfully out to the little cabin about which the great mystery was gathering.

The white rim of the old man's hair and whiskers made almost a halo about the sunken black face as he lay upon his bed, and a joyous smile lit it up as he took the hands of each and blessed and thanked them for all they had been to him.

"God knows you is made ever' breath I ever drawed happy—an' I'se gwine ter

meet yer up yonder—up yonder—yonder,” he repeated again and again, his dim eyes shining with a radiance not of earth—till the lids dropped slowly at last and the voice ceased.

The girls were sobbing gently, for they could not restrain themselves, and Mrs. Carter motioned for them to leave. Then she sat down beside him and took his thin old black hand, no longer rough, and held it between her soft palms while Mammy Sue knelt by the bed on the opposite side and held the other hand as she rocked and softly moaned.

The dim eyes opened in sudden brightness again. “Miss Alice,” he said, with new strength, “is yer got any ob ole Marster’s clo’s?”

“Yes, Uncle Sam,” Mrs. Carter returned.

“Won’t yer, please, ma’am, bury me in

one er his ole suits? It 'ud make me closer ter you—" the voice was dropping again—"an' perhaps I'll be white—in Heaven," it died to a whisper—she had to bend low over him to catch the words—"white, when I gits dar—white—white—" and the last must have been heard on the other side.

Everything would be done as it should be, as a matter-of-course, in the way of last rites for Uncle Sam, but the doctor took some things into his own hands, and met all expenses, paying surreptitiously all bills in advance.

He talked with Cahaba. "Now, Cahaba," he said, "you know just how Mammy Sue would like this—how Uncle Sam would have liked it himself. You plan it all just as though money was running in rivers."

Cahaba laughed, even on this solemn occasion.

"Well, doctor, you know there ain't a nigger, living or dead, that don't want a big funeral. It is the biggest thing that ever comes to most of us," she put in with a pathos in the statement of which the girl was wholly unconscious. "I think it would be a *great* comfort to Mammy Sue—and Uncle Sam would rise in his coffin to see it, if he could!"

The doctor joined with Cahaba in her laugh, and since they had it all to themselves, it did no harm.

"All right, Cahaba," said he heartily. "How many carriages do you think it will take?"

"Law-z-e-e!" she exclaimed, then added: "Doctor, if it gets out that there's going to be carriages for everybody, ever' last nigger in this town and

for ten miles out will be at the funeral, sick or well!"

"That's what we want," said the doctor, emphatically again, "we want everybody to come, and there'll be carriages for everybody, if I have to send away for them!"

But he did not have to send; when it was known that faithful old Uncle Sam was gone, and that there was going to be a big funeral, everybody far and near offered their carriages for the occasion and there was no lack.

The services were held in the rear yard at the Carters', for no house would have held the crowd, and the neat coffin stood in the open upon a stand which was one mass of flowers.

The colored minister did the occasion full justice, while the singing was beautiful beyond description; the melodious voices of the colored people, softened by

their sense of the nearness of death and glorified by their ready vision into the beyond through which this soul had just passed, rose and fell in a wonderful emotional cadence upon the soft Southern air, as the great company stood beneath the spreading live-oaks.

Aunt Martha and the doctor would never forget the scene or the music, and neither would the girls.

It was over, and the hushed company fell back while the body was borne to the hearse (adorned with tall, waving plumes at each upper corner, which the doctor had unearthed at the undertaker's), and Mammy Sue, Mr. and Mrs. Carter and Gene went in the first carriage, the doctor and Aunt Martha, Anne and Cahaba following; then carriage after carriage was filled, till the like of that procession had never been seen in the little town before!

It was destined to be told about for generations to come, and it placed Mammy Sue upon a prominence from which she never descended.

CHAPTER X

JOYFUL POSSIBILITIES

GENE GREY, being of sensitive fiber, which the blindness of early years had intensified, was indeed like the prototype her mother had chosen for her, the Marechal Neil rose; she thrived best under sunny skies and in balmy climes. But life was bringing her some testing to increase the strength of the fiber. Loving and beloved, things had gone, hitherto, much as she liked; recently she had been obliged to stand against cross-currents, and her delicate blossoming was in serious danger of blight. Denied again and again the privilege of helping those she

loved in the way she wished, a bit of stubbornness had grown in those sky-blue eyes that determined her to renounce at least the benefits of her wealth, and as long as the rest of the family continued to drudge, as she put it in her thought, she would drudge too. She was not going to school any more, she had firmly decided in spite of protest; which, however, was less urgent because she was obviously in no condition for study.

Warring with this newly developed stubbornness was her natural tenderness which made things hurt superlatively. She could not see Mr. Carter day after day troubled and dissipated without actual suffering. She could not look at Donald's picture on Anne's dresser without seeing pathetic appeal to her to send Anne to him; she could not watch the serious lines gather and mark her mother's

face without crying out in her heart that she could not, would not have it! Then, there had been poignant pain for her in the watching of Uncle Sam as his earthly lamp faded day by day. There were tears in every memory of what he had been to her through all the past years; how he had carried her in his arms from a baby, and told her the most wonderful things about the world of flowers and animals which she could not see, making them more vivid to her eager mind than any one else; how he had struggled with them and protected them for many years—and through it all had come her first rebellion against the ways of life.

Why must people wither and pass away, why must sorrow and disappointment spoil all the pleasures of the world? was the unspoken lament of days.

But with the old man's going, she had

seen at last the "light which never was on land or sea" in his fading eyes, had heard the final joy and triumph of soul in his voice as his spirit winged for flight, and a pervading peace had dropped upon her troubled heart in the fervent, exalted singing of that great concourse of colored folks—the lowliest of the earth voicing its highest triumphs—with a resultant lifting of her spirit beyond the things of seeming, into eternal verities which brought clarified vision, and made her want to sit alone in the brief twilight of the day after the funeral. May had returned to her school that morning, wanting to do some work in the library before the fall term opened. Quiet was upon the family as they sat together in the evening of that day, and Gene slipped away to her room.

A window looked out upon the flowers

of the yard, and she sat beside it, leaning her chin upon her hand.

How sweet and dear flowers were, began her quiet musing—so silent, and yet ministering all the time to the world. How beautiful they had made Uncle Sam's resting-place when it was banked, at last, with lovely blossoms. She wished they might grow on every barren and sorrowful spot in the world!

Then her thought went to the mountains where her thought had gone frequently, but it was not the dying "run" that she saw. Flowers were on the rugged slopes to brighten barren stretches, and little children looked out from dreary log cabins—but oh, with hungry, searching eyes!

Those were beautiful plans which Willard Griffith had made for them—if he could ever carry the plans out. He

hoped to get some more capital for his business, she again remembered now, and some one to take the financial side of the venture. She wondered if he had been successful.

Suddenly a thought illumined her quiet mind—dear—true—it seemed at once! Why should she not supply the capital, and Mr. Carter become the financial man at a princely salary?

The brilliant light flashed back into the “run” of the furnace, as she had seen it that night, and hope and strength lit her face till every possibility of beauty there came into sudden blooming.

She flew down-stairs to the library.

“Uncle Doctor, Aunt Martha, will you come with me a moment?” and looking up, astonished, at her transformed face, they immediately consented to her request.

Oh, how her heart bounded as they fol-

lowed her to her room. She could hardly breathe for several minutes when they were there, and none of them thought of seats till she had poured out her tale.

Aunt Martha's expression when she was done proclaimed instant approval, but the doctor asked many questions as to what Willard had told her about the business; and then, putting with it much that George had told them of the promise of the plant, he said at last, that white forelock flopping as it had not for many a day, as he struck it with his hand and bobbed his head in increasing satisfaction:

"Little Southern Johnny-jump-up that you are," (an old favorite name for her) "you have a business head on your shoulders like your New England grandfather!" And Aunt Martha fairly beamed with pride, while she said that she would

invest something there too, if it proved best.

That was the solution for them, the three felt instantly. To work it out successfully was the next problem, and they seated themselves to talk it over.

"I am afraid Mr. Carter will find objection. He will not accept anything just framed up to relieve his financial embarrassment," said the doctor, thoughtfully.

"But I *want* to invest in it," declared Gene, eagerly. "I was so interested in that furnace, and thinking about the valuable material hidden away in those mountains that ought to be brought out and made use of in the world."

"Yes," said the doctor, with a twinkle in his eye, "you had a very interesting narrator of those possibilities."

Gene blushed gratifyingly, from the doctor's point of view, and defended: "Now, Uncle Doctor, you are always teas-

ing. You know you were interested, too, in hearing the Griffiths tell about it, and so was Aunt Martha," to which both agreed.

"The thing to do," said Aunt Martha at last, "it seems to me, is to get Willard Griffith down here, and have him talk about it all, so Mr. Carter can hear and get interested too; then the proposition for investment there on the part of some of us can come up naturally."

That did seem a good plan, and the doctor left them to write at once to Willard telling him there was a possibility of securing some capital, and for him to come down as promptly as possible, wiring a reply, if necessary, to notify them.

Accordingly, two days later, as they sat at breakfast, the door bell rang and Cahaba brought in a yellow envelope for the doctor. This was torn open with an in-

scrutable face by its recipient, while Gene kept her eyes on her plate and the family sat in the silence that mysterious yellow envelopes always engender.

When he had finished there were broad reassuring smiles upon his face, to the relief of everybody except Gene, who never could tell what Uncle Doctor might do, and who, somehow, felt unaccountably guilty.

"Well," said the doctor, flirting that forelock terrifyingly to Gene's self-consciousness, "it seems there is a young mountain man who wants to come down this way. He doesn't say exactly for what—but perhaps Gene can tell—he seemed to have a good deal to say to her when we were up there."

The Marechal Neil girl suddenly became a crimson Rambler as the hot color raced over Gene's fair face.

"Now, Uncle Doctor—you're mean—you know he was nothing but just simply polite to me," she burst out, as soon as she could get her voice, and everybody laughed, for Gene had been the most quiet of the three girls and there had been little opportunity for teasing.

"Well," went on the doctor, complacently, while Aunt Martha tried to stop him with wifely nudges under the table, "he wants to come, and—I guess he will wear shoes—coming down here among civilized folks."

"Wear shoes!" cried Anne.

"Yes, I think so—but I could telegraph him to—if you think best—you know mountain folks don't wear them as a rule, they go barefoot," with great seriousness.

And they grew very hilarious over Gene's prospective barefoot beau, but it

was a grateful diversion for her flaming face.

"Who is it that wants to come, really?" urged Anne. "Aunt Martha, make him tell," she appealed.

"Now, doctor, you shall not talk any more—it is my turn," said Aunt Martha, who had taken the message from him and read it. "It is young Mr. Willard Griffith, whom we met at the furnace; he and his brother are joint owners of it, you know. He says he is coming this way on business and would be glad to call upon us, if he may, to-morrow."

"Oh, that will be so nice," said Anne. "I have wanted to see him ever since you-all told about him," and she glanced slyly at Gene, but said nothing more direct, for she was too kindly wise for that.

Aunt Martha, later in the privacy of their room, reproached the doctor decid-

edly for his handling of the telegram,—the first act in their conspiracy plot.

“Now,” he returned defensively, “there was no way in the world to hide the real purpose of his coming except to show it as a result of interest in Gene—and he won’t dispute or object to that, I’ll guarantee,” was the chuckling conclusion.

“No,” she admitted with chiding reluctance, “but it was very hard on Gene. You should not have teased her so.”

“Why, girls can’t be properly brought up without teasing; it is the most valuable antidote to self-consciousness we have,” he defended again, with twinkling eyes. “Gene needs more of it than she has ever gotten. That child is as sensitive as a flower; sure enough—girls unfold as they should under the proper amount of teasing—and she’s too rare and fine not to be allowed to get her full development.”

This was all true, Aunt Martha knew, but whether she was reconciled or not to the doctor's methods mattered little, for the joke was well under way in the household about Gene's barefoot beau, Murton Grey thinking it the finest one he had ever heard, and at last was keenly disappointed when he promptly looked at Willard's feet on the day of his actual arrival, and saw them neatly clad in up-to-date shoes!

And not only were the shoes of the young man from the mountains all that they should be, but he expressed neatness and good taste in all his dress, and his manner pleased the entire household. He came on the evening train, went at once to the hotel and then made his call afterward.

It was a family party that greeted him, and he was at once the courteous gentleman, at ease, but not blatantly so.

The doctor began asking questions about phases of the mountains in which they had become much interested during their visit, Aunt Martha and Gene (always with that rosy flushing) taking part as things occurred to them. Then the questions led to the furnace and mining interests, and it was observed by the three conspirators that Mr. Carter became at once alert, gradually taking the place of chief questioner.

The development accomplished, and under way in the iron industry, together with a sketch of future possibility were graphically put before him, and he exclaimed at last, "I have long felt that here lies the greatest opportunity of our State—in its hidden coal and iron."

Then, with the remembrance that he could never have part in any such development, which had been a recently awak-

ened hope with Mr. Carter when the financial disaster came, the light went out of his eyes and he soon left the room. All the elders quickly followed, leaving the young people together while Anne made the young man's better acquaintance, and finally she, too, left for Gene and Willard to have a talk together.

A little later when he had gone and Gene joined Anne up-stairs, the latter was enthusiastic.

"Oh, Gene, I think he is fine," she cried. "How interestedly he talked to the older folks—father just listened spell-bound—did you notice?" But not waiting for answer, she went on with characteristic warmth, "I hate boys or young men that can't be anything but beaux—I like them to be real men," "like Donald," she added with her heart and her eyes, though her lips refrained; but Gene,

quickly reading the silent speakers, supplied:

"No wonder you do, for Donald is always courteous and lovely to everybody."

"And Willard Griffith is the same," added Anne, generously, "I can see that."

"I am so glad you like him," said Gene, "but, you know, he isn't any beau of mine, really."

"No," returned Anne very demurely.

CHAPTER XI

UNCERTAIN CONSPIRACY

NEXT day, when Willard called, Anne and Gene took him out to see the Blossom Shop. His quick, trained eye at once took in the artistic lines of the little building, and when he stepped inside kindled with appreciation for the attractive interior.

“How beautiful and complete it is! A sort of beauty shrine it must have been for you as you grew up,” he said, as he stood with head thrown back looking at its arched ceiling and broad carved chimney.

This expressed what had been an unconscious fact for them, and Anne and Gene

looked at one another with pleased recognition.

Anne spoke: "I think that must have been so, though we didn't know it. Mother has always called us a Blossom Shop family, and made us feel we must try to live up to it," she laughed; "and I guess this little house has had its effect."

"Mother thinks beauty has a special mission in the world," said Gene, "and she has certainly tried to make us conscious of it and its possibilities in everything."

"It is in everything that is true, if we look for it, I suppose," returned Willard; "even in dusty, powerful, iron-smelting furnaces there is the element of beauty when everything moves with order and dignity—if you can use such a word in such a connection. Didn't you find the furnace 'run' beautiful that night when you saw it, Miss Grey?" he asked.

His heart was yearning over that furnace just now, like a mother over a sick child, and he wanted to bring the big, clumsy thing into this warmth and light and beauty!

"Beautiful! I should think so!" exclaimed Gene, warming responsively. "It was a beautiful and fascinating sight—and terrible, all in one. I never have forgotten it, and I do want to see it again. I think it is so wonderful, too, how that black dust is brought out of the ground and molded into iron to make all sorts of things that we use every day."

"We don't dream of where the iron comes from, or all it goes through, when we use the poker to punch the fire, do we?" laughed Anne. "Sit down and tell me something about it, Mr. Griffith, please," she went on. "I haven't seen it all, as Gene has."

So they seated themselves comfortably in the pleasant room and Willard began.

"You are so good," he laughed, "to let me talk 'shop,' for you know 'I am just dying to do it,' as you girls would say!" Then they listened while he told them many interesting natural facts of the mining work, and when he came to the furnace, which was his special part of the plant, he made it a real, pulsing, living thing. It was easy to see that his heart was there, and knowing, as Gene did, how the venture was hanging in the balance, though nothing was said about it, she cried in her heart, "Oh, it must come out all right for Mr. Carter—and everybody!"

"It's so worth while to be doing things, isn't it?" exclaimed Anne, always the enthusiast. "I never realized it until I went into business lately."

Willard looked at her, smiling inquiringly, for business and Anne in her dainty white dress did not seem quite compatible, and she laughed back merrily: "Yes—in the pine needle, china-berry, chincapin and flower business!"

Then they told him gayly of her commercial plans—and finally of the wedding which was to blossom out of it all in the end, and he entered into the story with the hungry warmth of a young fellow who had spent the past year away from mother and sisters and home interests.

Anne's impulsive answering warmth led her to say, at last, "And the wedding is going to be right here in this room—and you must be one of the groomsmen—I know Donald would say so, if he were here!" in a combination of child-like ingenuousness with womanly intuition that

this was what she was going to want ultimately, and why not speak now?

There was no doubt of Willard's appreciation as he replied: "I was never so honored in my life, Miss Carter, and I will be here—if the furnace runs, on which I shall be depending for *my* wedding raiment, do not die out in the meantime."

"Oh, they won't," assured Anne gayly; "they are going to burn brighter and brighter all the time."

And Gene cried in her heart again, "They must, oh, they must!" though she said nothing.

The girls went next with their guest to the college, the pride of the little town, to show him their beloved Alma Mater with its beautiful grounds and substantial buildings, and he was again very appreciative.

"Do you know," said Anne, "it all burned down when we were little girls—that is, not very big. And oh, it was dreadful! It just seemed that there could never be another school so dear and beautiful in all the world to take its place! Really, we children felt just as though our dearest friend was *dead*, and could never be resurrected."

Gene laughingly agreed with her, remembering that time of childish desolation.

"But, see what came up in its place! A much more beautiful group of buildings, and the old grounds did not compare with these! You see, I am trying to get wise enough to know that things often go, or do not come to pass, that better things may come in their place." Anne laughed.

"That's a mighty fine lesson, Miss Car-

ter, I'll try to take it from you," Willard returned earnestly.

"But there's one thing I don't think we could ever replace with a better," said Gene, "and that is old Uncle Abe, our colored school janitor. He has been with the school over twenty years—we call him the vice-president, and he always says, 'me an' de president did so an' so,'—the school couldn't run without him. We thought he was sick one year and perhaps was going to die, so we sent him down to New Orleans to Mardi Gras, and he rode back and forth across the river on the ferry boat all day long—eating up a big bunch of bananas he had bought to bring his wife! He said he had always wanted to see 'dat Mississippi ribber,' and that was all he talked about when he came back."

"But it cured him," laughed Anne,

"and all the girls hope he will live forever!"

"May his shade never grow less," responded Willard with fervency.

When the three had returned home at last from their sight-seeing and Anne and Gene were alone in their room, Anne gave another most emphatic, "Oh, Gene, I think he is fine!"

While the young people had been thus occupied, Dr. Murton was having a long talk with Mr. Carter in his office at the center of the little town, telling him frankly that his wife and Gene were greatly interested in the mining and iron-making possibilities of the State. They had wanted to invest up there, but he had not felt competent to advise them upon it, and had really asked young Griffith to come down and talk about it with possible reference to investment.

"That child Gene," the doctor laughed, "is her New England grandfather all over again in her love for constructive business. I saw it plainly at the furnace, and I don't believe she will ever care much about spending money for the sake of spending—she really wants the fun of making some!"

Mr. Carter smiled a bit in return, and then the doctor went on,—“Now, I want you to tell me what you think of the opportunities in the Alabama mountains from hearing Griffith talk.”

“Well,” said Mr. Carter slowly, “I have been interested for some time in the possibilities of our State in the coal and iron regions. If I had the money I should be disposed to invest there. But I haven't,” and his lips closed firmly. “As to your wife or Gene's investing there—that is quite another matter. They have

no need to do so—and should not unless every investigation shows that it is perfectly safe.”

“That’s just what must be done,” returned the doctor eagerly, “for you know when women get started on anything, you must have good proof against it to turn them from it. Both my wife and Gene have their hearts quite set upon it, and what we all want is for you to undertake the investigation.”

Seeing that Mr. Carter hesitated, the doctor continued: “This is not so sudden as it seems. We have talked much over it, and that is why we are lingering here now. We are very much in earnest. Can’t you return with Griffith and take up the whole situation in detail?”

“Well, I suppose I can do so—but I shall not be content to recommend any-

thing until I have investigated very thoroughly."

"Exactly what we want," returned the doctor. "Griffith says an expert from the East was at the plant not long ago with reference to this very thing—the enlisting of more capital—and you can go East to see him."

"If I do, I shall investigate the whole subject of furnace working while there, and know the ground, on the financial side, as well as possible."

"Exactly," exclaimed the doctor, again, his forelock bobbing in delight. "Now, another thing," he went on, under this encouragement, "the Griffiths' told me when we were there that they needed a third interested man in the firm to look after the financial side; George at the head of the mining, and Willard at the furnace, have all they can do, each in his

own department, and we feel that you are just the man for the place."

Mr. Carter's eyes lit up for an instant and then cooled: "First we must see if it is safe and promising as an investment—and then I think I understand the offer you are making."

This quite took the doctor unaware, and he floundered a bit. "No, no,—I think the investment will be entirely dependent upon your taking part in the management—as an assurance of integrity and safety," not helping matters much.

"I don't feel that I would be in the position I would like there if I had no personal investment in the plant," returned Mr. Carter, with a quiet finality that the doctor could not meet.

He went back to his fellow conspirators and his forelock was not bobbing.

"What is the matter?" asked Aunt

Martha instantly, while Gene looked anxiously in his face.

"Oh, these independent Southern folks!" he exclaimed with fine disgust. "Mr. Carter scents the whole thing as a frame-up for his benefit, and I don't believe he will take a position there."

"Oh, oh!" cried Gene in dismay, and Aunt Martha looked her disappointment. "Then I can't invest in it, can I?" cried Gene again, and the light was suddenly gone from the world, though she could not have told altogether why.

"That is not a necessary conclusion," returned the doctor. "Mr. Carter is going back with Willard and will make a thorough investigation of the whole matter. If he finds it safe and promising he will recommend investment probably for you, if you desire."

This helped things strangely for Gene,

but did not lift the cloud as far as anxiety for Mr. Carter was concerned.

"I shall not be in favor of any investment there if Mr. Carter will not take charge of the financial side of the business," said Aunt Martha, decidedly. "He has shown wonderful business ability in accumulating the property he did in this little town, where there is so small an opportunity, and if he had the chance in a larger field he would show what he can do, I am sure. Without him at the head I am most decidedly opposed to the investment."

"Oh, dear," thought Gene, "why won't things go smoothly that are the best for—so many people?"

It was all very discouraging, and the conspirators three lost their high spirits while there was danger also of loss of complete harmony in the ranks, for Gene was

summoning a bit of that New England grandfather's determination in a secret decision to invest some money in that furnace plant, if Mr. Carter found it a safe and promising possibility, while Aunt Martha was secretly deciding that Gene must not be allowed to do so—unless Mr. Carter took charge.

So it happened that the start of the two travelers, Willard Griffith and Mr. Carter, the next day for the mountains, was quiet and subdued, nobody in the family seeming to feel enthusiasm, and Willard himself sensing indefinable discouragement.

Gene stood with the rest to say good-by to him and there was something wistful in the quick glance which they exchanged,—in youth's appeal, each to each, from the stress of life's first battles.

A little later Gene's mother, who,

though not enthusiastic, was yet hopeful of the successful outcome of this new possibility, put an arm about her and said:

“Thank God for my little blind girl who can *see*, not only with her dear sky-blue eyes, now, but who can see with her heart and her clear, active mind!”

CHAPTER XII

A STARTLING TURN OF AFFAIRS

THE day after Mr. Carter's leaving, Anne, in passing through the upper hall, saw her mother turning into the doorway of her room and suddenly putting a hand out to steady herself. Anne was instantly at her side.

"Mother, what is it?" the girl cried in quick alarm.

"Why, nothing," returned Mrs. Carter promptly, but a bit limply.

"Now, mother, I know something is the matter," persisted Anne, anxiously.

"I simply have a headache this morn-

ing, and was a little dizzy, but it amounts to nothing."

"Well, it amounts to just enough for me to put you to bed!" returned Anne in sudden girlish authority, and she led her mother into the bedroom with quite determined young arms.

"Anne, I will be all right in a few minutes," said the mother, still protesting.

"Yes, I know, when I get you in bed," Anne agreed, laughing, but still firm.

And so it was that Mrs. Carter found herself in charge of her young daughter for the first time in their mutual history, and dropping back luxuriously on the pillows of her bed at nine o'clock in the morning.

"Now," went on the young voice authoritatively, standing beside her charge,

“you are not to get up to-day. You are to lie still and do nothing but rest. You’ve had too much to think about lately. I forbid you to think at all this whole day!”

The mother smiled back wanly at the girl’s mock severity, but it was blessed to lie still with the prospect of not having to think for one day. There had indeed been a great strain upon her during the previous weeks; a strain which only wives know when disaster overtakes the husband and she must be strong and steady and far-seeing for both for a space. Then Uncle Sam’s illness and death had taxed her heart not only in the experience itself, but with its stirring of old memories of struggle and sorrow. She simply needed rest, as Anne with quick realization had seen, and which was verified by Dr. Murton when he had been called in by the

girl for consultation, as she laughingly said.

Always glad to uphold Anne, he said her diagnosis had been perfect, adding: "And now we are going to run this ranch ourselves, Anne and I, until we see fit to re-install you!"

Mrs. Carter relaxed luxuriously at last, and the doctor bobbed his forelock in great satisfaction, for it was just what he wanted—to get his hands upon the management of that household in some fashion, and, incidentally, his hand in the purse to meet daily needs.

When he and Anne went out in the hall together he remarked innocently: "Your mother usually goes to market in the morning, doesn't she? You will need to look after her and I will attend to that for you. I must go up town to mail a letter, anyway."

But Anne was wary; she had heard him offer to market for her mother too often, always to be refused, so she replied,

“Thank you so much, but I know Gene will want to care for mother; I am going now to get her and tell her mother is not well. She has been out gathering some peaches which she insisted on doing after breakfast. Then I will go up town, for I know just what mother wants done, and we wouldn’t bother you with it for anything.”

Defeated, the doctor said no more, hoping for better opportunities—which indeed were on the way most unexpectedly for all.

Anne caught the flutter of a pink dress from the crotch of a late-bearing peach tree, and then of a face glowing with the exercise and warm September sun, as

Gene laughed down at her coming along the garden walk.

"Your face is just as pink as your dress," Anne laughed back at her, "and it's very becoming, but I have a job for you indoors. Now don't be scared—but mother has a headache. I made her go to bed, and I want you to see that she stays there while I go to market."

Gene dropped from the tree in quick alarm. The old clinging of little groping hands had been changed for her to a clinging of heart with tendrils that thrilled sensitively at the least untoward symptom from her mother.

"Anne, mother is very ill, I know, and you don't want to tell me!" The pink face went white.

"Indeed she is not," declared Anne convincingly. "She is just tired out. Uncle Doctor says so, and now that father is gone,

she is going to do nothing but rest, if there is any authority left in the household—and Uncle Doctor and I have stirred up a lot already this morning.”

Somewhat relieved, Gene walked quickly back to the house with Anne and up to her mother’s room.

“More spoiling for me, I see,” smiled Mrs. Carter, already stronger from relaxation, and Gene took up the giving of orders and the petting where Anne had left it off.

“Where is your purse, mother?” said Anne. “I am going to market now.”

“In the upper dresser drawer,” Mrs. Carter returned. Then she added: “Be careful, Anne, how you spend, for that must last us till your father gets back.”

“I know,” Anne returned. “I shall be so stingy that my buying instead of you will be a great advantage to this poor old

purse. It may even begin to swell up, it will be so proud of itself!"

She went out in gay confidence, but once on the street she looked in the purse to see how much money there really was. Only four dollars and ninety cents! Anne did not know much about buying table supplies for a household of eight people, all with very good appetites and Murton Grey with one which could only be described as unlimited, but she felt intuitively that the sum the purse held would simply be impossible for a month's supplies. She was unaware that snugly hidden away in another compartment of the purse lay a more substantial bill, a more adequate, though not lavish, resource for the month's needs. Mrs. Carter, in her unusual relaxation, did not remember to speak of the reserve amount.

If Anne was disturbed on the way as the

small amount was revealed to her, she was dismayed when she reached the market and found how rapidly steaks and chops, flour, coffee, etc., counted up when a purse is thin. If mother was troubled like this every day—why she, for one, was certainly going to eat less hereafter. And Murton Grey—she surely was going to take a tuck in his stomach, as she had heard was sometimes necessary with growing boys—why, he must eat up a lot of money every day!

With the wide eyes of her childhood, when life was every day bringing unexpected things to her, Anne made cautious purchases, and started home soberly at last, with absorbing determination to find new ways of economy and money-making. No wonder mother was sick if she had to worry like this every day over what she bought for them to eat! Then a little

bitterness came creeping in, as it is ever on the watch to do with a discouraged mind. If it had not been for Colonel Thompson—and then—who should come cantering down the road on his favorite spirited saddle-mare, which had by some means been retained in the wreck of his fortunes, but Colonel Thompson, himself!

The mare was in fine mettle this morning and danced a bit as she passed, necessitating a tight rein from her rider, but the Colonel was not too occupied with her control to fail to look with keen eyes directly upon Anne.

It was the first time the girl had ever found great difficulty in producing a determined smile, but now it seemed held fast by that creeping strain of bitterness, and the bright young head was forced to nod at last with only a faint, constrained flicker of pleasant muscles about the

mouth, and not a ghost of a smile in the blue-gray eyes.

The Colonel, however, was too far away out in the road to notice all this with his somewhat failing eyes, and he lifted his hat gallantly to her, as he had come to do in recent weeks.

The mare cantered spiritedly past and Anne hurried on with disturbed thoughts toward home, which was then only half a city block away.

Suddenly she stopped at the sound of madly flying hoofs down the street behind her, and turning involuntarily, she saw Colonel Thompson and his mare charging down the road at a terrific pace. Before she could think, the frightened animal had plunged toward the sidewalk where she stood, then, seeming to see her, whirled again with high-flung hoofs, tossing the helpless Colonel in a huddled mass

against a telegraph pole at her feet, and, unburdened, fled like a comet in a trail of dust down the road out of sight. It was a paralyzing moment of horror merged into another filled with terrible groans from the huddled figure. Anne looked frantically about to see if any one was in sight, but when the clattering hoofs died away not a sound save the groans marred the quiet of the little town, and no one appeared on the street.

"Lord, Lord, help me!" cried the suffering man, and Anne's girlish horror-stricken face bent over him.

One glance at her and he vociferated: "Lord, can't you see I'm dying with pain? Move me, girl, move me, I say!"

"How?" cried Anne.

"Off this leg—can't you see it's broken, you fool?"

With all her might Anne tugged to get

him over on his back amid curses and execrations till the pain of it sent the suffering man into merciful oblivion.

“Oh, he is dead!” she cried in her heart. His head was hanging back in the gutter-trough and she lifted it to her knee—she couldn’t see it hanging so horribly. Then she prayed: “Oh, God, send somebody to help me!” over and over again, but not a passer-by appeared, and the song of a bird only made more bare the stillness.

What could she do? If Uncle Doctor would only come! Suppose the Colonel should die—if he hadn’t already—because no one came to help? She must do something, get somebody. Suddenly her eye lit upon the package of meat she was carrying home and which had been dropped in her excitement. She could just reach it, and, without a thought, she tucked the

bundle of economically bought steak and chops under the Colonel's limp head. Then she flew on the wings of the wind. The little singing bird could scarce have beaten her. The doctor was just coming to the front door—perhaps in answer to that prayer of hers—and she fell upon him with breathless revelation and appeal.

“Wait, wait, Anne,” he said sternly, and held her close till the breath was more regular and the heart less tumultuous. Then she told him more coherently what had happened.

“Come with me,” was all he said, and the two went again with all speed to the injured man.

“He has fainted with pain,” said the doctor after examination; “his hip is broken; I don't know what else. We must get him to the house as quickly as possible.”

"Our house, you mean?" questioned Anne.

"Yes; it is imperative."

The doctor did not know that this injured man was the cause of the Carters' loss of fortune, he did not know Colonel Thompson by sight, but probably that would have made no difference had he known, for the physician's instinct was dominant.

"Go, Anne, and get some one to help—and bring my medicine case—my wife will tell you where it is. Get anybody, to help move him as quickly as you can."

Anne's feet were again like wings in their speed, but the psychic call that brings a crowd from the bowels of the earth, seemingly, when there has been an accident, was now at work, and before she was hardly in the house willing hands on the street were offered to carry the

limp form slowly and with utmost care into the quiet home of the family whom he had wronged.

Anne had roused the house meantime, being careful, however, that the news reached her mother as quietly as possible. Aunt Martha and Gene at once began making a bed ready, and Anne herself met the burdened men at the door, with the doctor's medicine-case in her hand. They paused in the hall while the doctor administered a hypodermic and then bore the injured colonel up the stairs into Anne's own room? That could quickest be put in readiness, and dispatch was the ruling motive with every one involved.

A moment of time, and life has cast the facts of a common-place day into an unbelievable cataclysm with all the ease and seemingly flippant flying of hoofs displayed by the Colonel's high-strung mare.

The Colonel lying white and helpless in Anne's bed, the hands who had brought him there all dismissed, and she stood at the doctor's side, at his command, ready to do his bidding.

"Martha cannot help with this—she began too late in life—but you've got good stuff in you, Anne. I depend on you to help us. I have sent for a doctor, but he may be a dozen miles away on these red clay hills, and we must do what we can while he is quiet."

The doctor arrived promptly, however, but Anne soon proved herself indispensable. She, in her startling experience, had already gone beyond the region of quivering nerves, into a new world of marvelously clear brain, steady muscles and intuitive movement. She found herself assisting in giving an anesthetic and deftly anticipating the doctor's every

thought, it almost seemed. Dr. Murton had laid in a full supply of bandages and all things needful for their trip to the mountains early in January, not knowing what experience might surprise them on such an expedition, and these supplies were adequately supplemented by the other physician's forethought. So the work moved forward under the two doctors' skillful hands, with Anne to help, and careful setting of the broken hip was promptly and successfully accomplished.

Not one of them had taken account of time or had thought of eating, but glancing at Anne with affectionate eyes at last, when all was done, Dr. Murton said peremptorily, "Go, get you something to eat at once." And Anne wonderingly obeyed. Eat—why, she had forgotten there was such a thing as food necessary.

Slowly she made her way down-stairs and into the dining-room still in a daze. Cahaba met her.

"Miss Anne, you's just starved, I know! Everybody's eat but you and the doctor," she went on, as Anne looked inquiringly around. "But they wouldn't if it hadn't been for me. I almost had to stuff it down Miss Martha, she was so upset, and Miss Gene made your mother eat. I hope I won't have to do that with you," she ended anxiously.

"No," said Anne at last, coming back to the normal, "I'm hungry, I really believe!"

"In course you are," cried Cahaba with happy reversion to aboriginal speech, "an' I will bring your dinner right in."

Dinner suggested steak and chops and Anne hurried anxiously after her into the kitchen.

"Why, what did you have for dinner, Cahaba?" she cried.

Cahaba gave her head a scornful little toss for preliminary answer.

"I ain't got that meat old Colonel Thompson was a-laying on, that's sure! That smart black Tom, what tries to come 'round here, brought it to me—a-grinnin', sayin' 'Here is your dinner Colonel Thompson had for a pillow out in the street.' He knows I hate that man like pizen, anyway—and I jus' 'bout busted his head with that bundle of meat!"

When she and Cahaba had laughed together, "Where did you get this, then?" asked Anne, leaving other points of interest for the main thing—where had the meat come from?

"I jus' told that nigger if he ever wanted to come 'round here again, he'd go up to town and get me some meat what

hadn't been contaminated by that snake that's up-stairs in your room! 'And I throwed the money after him. Don't ask me whose money; now, Miss Anne, I'se had all I can stand for one day—and you have too, I s'pect."

There was something about Cahaba that comes even to the humblest, at times—a sort of finality which compels the respect of others.

Anne also was too tired, now that she had relaxed, to ask any further questions and she went back to the dining-room while Cahaba served her bountifully.

How did Cahaba know anything about Colonel Thompson? That she did was very evident. She was scarcely through her dinner when the colored girl appeared and stood by the table. "Miss Anne," she began, "is you going to keep him here?"

"Why, of course, Cahaba; we must till he is able to be moved."

"In your room?" the girl protested.

"Certainly; I can easily stay with—Gene."

"Don't do it, for the Lord's sake, Miss Anne! Mammy Sue says she's afraid he will hoodoo the house, if you do," and Cahaba's voice had a touch of superstitious awe.

"Look here, Cahaba, you know better than that," said Anne severely.

"Well, anyhow," returned the girl, ashamed of betraying the failing of her race, "we all hate him like poison, as I told you," and her eyes flashed with anger and resentment.

"What do you know about him?" asked Anne quietly.

"Know 'bout him? Why, everybody in this town knows that he stole everything

your father had and brought all this trouble to us all. You think folks don't know it?" and she laughed. "Why, even every nigger knows, let 'lone white folks, and I must say, Miss Anne, I'se had a time making you seem respectable," (Cahaba was getting entirely off her balance) "'cause they tell me you speaks to him and smiles at him whenever you sees him on the street."

If anything was needed to make Anne realize the difference between the unbridled hate of ignorance and the sweet peace of a spirit determinedly lifted above enmity and revenge, it was put before her in the contrast between Cahaba's fiery temper and her own strange calm after complete surrender to the law of whole-hearted service to an enemy. That service had first been whole-hearted through involuntary action on her part, it was true,

but according to its law it brought, as it always and inevitably does, exemption from resentful passion.

"Now, Cahaba," said Anne, with a peculiar shade of authority that was entirely new between them, "we have nothing to do with Colonel Thompson's sins—against us or any one else. He is here, helpless and suffering, and we must do all we can for him. That is all I have to say."

It was Cahaba's turn to recognize finality, and Anne rose with her own attitude clearly defined and more promptly than it otherwise might have been.

Uncle Doctor, coming along the hall at that moment, heard Anne's declaration of humanitarian policy, and though he did not then know all that was back of it, his white forelock bobbed with admiration.

"Look here, Cahaba, have you let Anne

eat up all there is? I am hungry as a school-boy!"

"No, indeed, doctor, there's plenty for you," the girl assured him, and stepped quickly to the kitchen for more supplies.

"Anne, see here—" he turned enthusiastically to her, "you are going to miss your calling if you continue the pursuit of wedding finery!" And at Anne's ringing laugh he grew vehement: "I tell you I feel almost called upon to break up that surging line of letters between you and England and reserve you for home consumption! Why, child, you are a born nurse! Florence Nightingale would not be in it any more if this Southern mockingbird should don a cap and apron!"

"Uncle Doctor, you need some dinner to steady your head," Anne laughed as Cahaba brought in the dinner.

When she had gone he turned again to

Anne with moist eyes: "Child, you were splendid!"

With a singing heart Anne left him to see how her mother was after all the excitement, thus leaving the way open for Cahaba to come back on some pretext and enlighten the doctor as to the identity of the injured man lying in Anne's sunny bedroom.

He dropped knife and fork in utter amazement at the revelation. Imagining a feeling akin to hers in this demonstration, Cahaba said, jokingly, but with plenty of animosity back of the suggestion:

"Doctor, can't we pizen him?"

"Well, Cahaba, I confess I feel like it—but I guess we won't. Anne has set us the example of putting a few coals of fire on his head—perhaps we had better follow it."

“That Anne!” he muttered under his breath as Cahaba left him, putting a world of concentrated affection in the exclamation.

CHAPTER XIII

STRENUOUS THINGS FOR ANNE

WHEN Dr. Murton returned to the Colonel's bedside, the injured man was just rousing.

"Where is she?" he demanded.

"Whom do you want?" asked the doctor with intuitive suspicion that it was Anne, the old reprobate (as he characterized the Colonel in his thought thereafter) was asking for, and determined at once to forbid further service on her part at the bedside.

"Anne—Anne Carter, I tell you, where is she?" in a dazed sort of way.

"Yes, she was here and did care for

you when you were first hurt, but her business is not nursing," and there was a very stern note in his voice; "she is too young and inexperienced—"

The Colonel fairly snorted as he threw off the thralldom of opiates with angry determination: "I say I want her here, and I am going to have her! Do you know what it is to interfere with a Thompson?" and he made as if to rise only to find himself horribly bound with pain, bandages and weights.

The next few minutes were filled with a volley of oaths and raving against the tragedy which had befallen him, with execrations against the mare who had been frightened at nothing as the whole thing came back to him, and it took both doctors to hold him and manage a hypodermic syringe. When the latter had begun to take effect the blanched face

turned in strange appeal: "I want to see her!"

And Anne was at the door, having heard the commotion and come at once to see if she could help, not dreaming that she was the innocent cause of the trouble.

The Colonel lay upon her bed, his once fine face showing the traces of unbridled temper and a weakening of the once clean lines of strength and honesty which had distinguished his antecedents. The hair was gray which fell upon his high forehead and an iron gray mustache, immaculately kept, bristled beneath a large well-formed nose. His length was long and little surplus flesh marked its proportions, while unused muscles gave a suggestion of frailty to the prostrate figure which was not borne out in actual vitality. As Anne came to the bedside, he reached a slender, tapering but very

firm hand out to her and when she took it wonderingly, he gripped it with a vice-like intensity, and did not let go; she was obliged to sit down beside him while he fell into sleep again. This was but a forecast of the hours and days to follow. He called for Anne constantly the moment she was out of the room, and it was impossible to keep him quiet unless she was there, while, intensely profane when she was out of sight, not an oath passed his lips in her presence. Nurses were not common in the little town, but if there had been one at hand she could not have relieved Anne, for it became little short of fatal for her to be long from the sick-room during the day, and only opiates for the patient gave her relief from her task at night.

Anne had never done any nursing of the sick in her life; if any one had told

her a week before that such a task was immediately at hand for her, she would have been appalled. But here was the helpless man clinging to her in his suffering, his very life seeming to hang upon her presence in those first days of half delirium from pain and necessary narcotics, and with her warm-hearted instincts and efficiency along many lines, she seemed to unfold spontaneously as a nurse. Not only did the little art of soothing come easily to her young hands, but the doctor also found he could rely on her judgment in matters of more serious moment, thus admirably fulfilling his prediction.

When the doctor had been ready to keep her away from the sickroom, and let the consequences be what they might, Anne had been very firm. "If the Colonel wants me I am going to stay, Uncle

Doctor. Poor old man, everybody says he has had his own way all his life, ordering servants and family around like a tyrant. My! Uncle Doctor, if having one's own way makes folks as dreadful as he is, nobody ought to want just their own way all the time!"

The doctor had laughed, "Well, most of us are willing to risk it, I guess, Anne."

Truth to tell, the doctor was feeling a little guilty—just pleasantly so, however, for he, with Cahaba's connivance, was carrying things his own way with a high hand. Cahaba abandoned her school which opened about that time, and continued giving all her time to the family needs. With Mrs. Carter still under rest commands, forbidden to have anything to do with household affairs, and Anne obliged to stay with the Colonel, she kept possession of the kitchen with no one to

say her nay. Then came the doctor's opportunity. When he took his daily walk in the morning the market was his destination and the family table fairly groaned for a period. His wife also aided and abetted the scheme.

Anne did not give it all a thought those first strenuous days in the sickroom. The only other vital interest she could compass were the ocean letters and they were very meager. She thought ruefully to herself, "They are not big enough to stir up much foam." When she did think of other things, her first realization was that Cahaba was not at her school.

"Cahaba, what do you mean by staying away from your school?" she cried, going at once to the kitchen where the girl was busy washing dishes.

"Shucks," said the teacher in reply, making the dishes fly from the pan to the

sink, "them little niggers, most of 'em, is jes' nat'rally gettin' bald, scratchin' their heads to find something that ain't in 'em! They ain't got a bit of sense; I'm tired fooling with 'em, Miss Anne."

"Now, Cahaba, you know that isn't so! I have heard you brag how fast they learned."

"Well," returned Cahaba, defensively, "that's jes' a few of 'em, them that learn, and I done foun' out that they're gettin' the big head so, they're likely to bust any minute!" Cahaba's own learning which she had always put on or off at will, seemed fast vanishing altogether in her scorn of "nigger larnin'" in general.

"Cahaba, that won't do," said Anne—but in a puzzled way—for how could they get along without her—so many in the family and no one who ought to do the work.

The girl caught that worried look and instantly changed her tactics. "Miss Anne, don't you bother yourself 'bout my school. I got somebody to take my place—a good teacher, too—better than I am, a whole heap."

"You are the best thing in the world, Cahaba," Anne returned warmly, and she could not have paid the girl more completely.

But the money they were spending began to worry Anne, and she could not say a word, for Colonel Thompson had to have delicacies, and everybody *had* to eat if the heavens fell while they were doing it! She didn't dare ask where supplies were coming from—but sometime they would have to be paid for. She must get to making money just as fast as she could. Wedding finery? Oh, no, shimmering gowns and jeweled crowns had grown

very dim of late—she must earn money that they might pay for what they ate.

She looked out the window as she mused one day while the Colonel, who was greatly improved now, took a nap, and there, in full view, was a china-berry tree hung with clustering, soft yellow balls. She cringed instantly as she thought of how they smelt—but oh, why not gather and dry some now, and go at once to making the necklaces she hoped to sell! She couldn't wait till nature finished her part in the work. She slipped excitedly away while she had opportunity and at once enlisted Gene and Cahaba in picking them, who laughed at her, but were willing to help. They went out immediately, the three, and finding the ground covered with the "squashy" yellow balls, they cleared this first, making much ado over the odor, and then the

agile Cahaba cried, "Lemme climb the tree! When I was a little nig, don't you know, I could beat any boy skinning a tree?" And in a twinkling she was up in the spreading china-berry, and handing down loads of them to the others, while they held their noses and alternated between disgust and joy over the golden pile which held such great promise.

Murton Grey came along, and joined the force after duly expressing his scorn of ripe china-berries.

"They're no good except when they are green," he ended, "then they are dandy bullets for pop-guns."

"We know that," laughed Anne and Gene. "Haven't we made many a pop-gun, and shot out enough green china-berries to kill all the birds in the country—if they had ever hit anything?" went on Anne.

"Well, that old Mr. Bird has been hit by a ripe one," cried Murton Grey. "See how drunk he is—he has been eating them!" And, sure enough, the poor thing dashed about helplessly with his bird brain beclouded by ripe china-berries.

"Oh, Mr. Bird, I am ashamed of you," said Gene; "you know better—you needn't pretend you don't!"

"Knowin' better and doin' better is two different things," dropped Cahaba sagely from the tree top.

Then she went on with seeming irrelevance: "There's a heap of people that thinks they are great because they's got some handle to their names—Colonel, or somethin' like that, when they ain't fit to walk the earth with some other folks—much less sleep on their beds and eat out of their kitchen!" She added in a still

louder voice, "Somebody'll get a spider in their dumplin' yet!"

Cahaba would have her fling at the Colonel, now and then, and looking now up into his room from her perch, she was aroused anew.

It rankled deeply all the time that she had to prepare things for that buzzard (her private term for him) to eat. She had protested to Anne that she couldn't get the dishes clean that he ate out of, and declared that she had to scald and sun every one of them. As a matter of fact she would not wash an article he had used with any other dishes; she had a separate pan for his things, and had secret intention of burying it along with every dish he had used, when he left.

She had made the speech now with a daring hope that he might hear it, as the china-berry tree was not far from his win-

dow, but Anne and Gene had both cried, "Sh-sh-sh-ee, Cahaba," in quick, emphatic rebuke, while to cover it, Anne went on: "Ripe china-berries are detestable, there is no doubt about that, but just wait till they are transformed! I will give you a necklace for your sweetheart, Murton Grey, when I have one finished, if you will help with picking and spreading the berries to dry."

But this offer proved a decided damper to Murton Grey's activity. "When I have a sweetheart she won't wear china-berry necklaces," said that young scion of Southern aristocracy, and promptly left them.

Cahaba then was heard from again. "Miss Anne, you certainly can't sell no china-berry things to Southern folks; you see even the chillen will turn up their noses at 'em."

"I don't expect to sell them to folks here," returned Anne stoutly, not to be thwarted in her plans, but her mind ran quickly along discouraging paths, nevertheless. She must make some money and help buy things to eat, and while china-berries should be left till fall or mid-winter to dry on the tree, for they wouldn't be so disagreeable then, she didn't know any other way just now till chincapins were ready in late October to make a bit of money. Mother had had only four dollars and ninety cents with which to buy things for them to eat for a whole month—for father might be gone that long—and she didn't remember how much of that startling sum she had spent the day the Colonel was hurt. She had returned the purse to her mother without learning of the reserve amount in another compartment, and had not found heart to discuss

the matter of money since, while Mrs. Carter had been completely silenced by Dr. Murton's insistence that she should have nothing to do even with family accounts for a time—he and Anne were managing things.

Gene, busy with the gathering of disagreeable fruit in material shape, felt a sudden surge of bitter protesting thought at Murton Grey and Cahaba's scorn of Anne's necklaces-to-be. Why wouldn't mother and the rest of them let her do things for them with her money? There was nothing the world held of travel or treasure or learning that she wanted so much as to help these dear ones, and quick, angry tears sprang to the young eyes.

They might as well have been under a juniper tree, the three girls with their youth and strength and high spirits.

"Look here," cried Anne, sensing it all, her own discouraging excursion of thought after miserable family facts, and Gene's glistening tears which she could readily interpret, together with Cahaba and Murton Grey's contempt for her project, "I am not going to let these mean old china-berries get the best of me (she was a child again in the vigor and unreason of her combativeness), the necklaces are going to turn out just beautiful, and I am going to send them North, and sell them to folks that don't know a thing about china-berries before they evolved!"

The other two laughed heartily at her vehemence and all returned to work in earnest till at last a great quantity of the dead-ripe berries were spread out in the sun to dry. But, viewing them finally, Anne's fully recovered enthusiasm could

not wait for this slow but sure process of drying.

"Cahaba, we will put them in pans and dry them in the oven," she cried.

"Not in my oven, Miss Anne! Goodness! It would turn my stomach clean wrong side out!"

"Nonsense, Cahaba, they wouldn't smell a bit with the oven door shut!"

Of course Cahaba gave in, and a big pan full was set in the oven, with a slow fire that they might not burn up. When Anne and Gene went down later to see about them, there was, in truth, a very dominating odor in the kitchen, and Cahaba had her nose tied down flat upon her face with a red handkerchief of Mammy Sue's.

The girls were at once in a giggle over how funny Cahaba looked, though she refused to smile, and then Anne cautiously

opened the oven-door. All three flew for outdoors, Cahaba leading the way—for she knew what was coming—and the three laughed till the tears came. They did not try the oven again for drying, but a little later Anne took happy possession of two big sun-dried pans full, ready for the scraping process which should take the dried tissue from the corrugated seeds. Gene insisted on helping with this, and the two girls took their work (when air and sun had removed all odor from the berries) to the Colonel's room. He loved to have both girls there now, and watch while their clever young fingers pushed a needle in and out, chatting together the while. With the pain largely gone from the injured hip, the pretty room with its girlish equipment and these two, with their youth and freshness going in and out, were like a bit of heaven to

him. An old sister, who in her feebleness had been unable to come to him, and himself had made up his family for years, and as Anne had said, he ruled everybody and everything about him with a rod of iron, blighting their lives and his own. He secretly hoped now in this attractive atmosphere that he would not be able to walk for months—a hope to be very surely fulfilled—and that it would be impossible to move him from his present quarters. That he was a burden upon the household was not a matter that he could be expected to worry about.

After he had watched the girls with their new work a few minutes, he asked, "What have you got there now?"

They laughed, for they had intended to puzzle him, and Gene took him one to examine: "See if you can tell what it is."

He looked it over carefully, but could not make out what it could be. "It is an old ugly, smelly china-berry," Gene exclaimed at last, "and Anne is proposing to make gorgeous necklaces out of them to sell."

"Necklaces!" he exclaimed. "For some hottentot then, I guess," he added scornfully.

"Now, Colonel," said Anne—they had gotten to be wonderful friends by this time, "they are going to be perfectly beautiful before I get through with them. When they are scraped, they are to be dyed beautiful colors, and strung with pearls interspersed, and you cannot imagine how elegant they are going to be!"

"No, I don't think I can," chuckled the Colonel.

Then Anne flew for him and went through all the motions of a dreadful

shaking of his long, lank frame. But he watched with keen interest while the girls worked, and acknowledged at last when a finished string of delicate rose-colored corrugated beads, with here and there a pearl, was put into his hands by the proud Anne, that it was indeed a very pretty thing.

"Jove! Those will sell like hot cakes!" he said warmly. "What will you do with all the money you are going to get?"

A serious look flashed into Anne's eyes for a moment as she remembered the bills which were piling up as she supposed—but she must not let him know about that, and with a quick smile following it, she said, "I will tell you if you will promise to keep my secret."

"The promise is yours," was his prompt reply.

"It is to go into wedding finery!"

The Colonel's hand clasped hers and his eyes grew moist as they gazed into the glistening gray-blue depths beside him.

"Bless you, child," he murmured brokenly. He wanted to say, "God bless you," but it had been many years since he used that name except to blaspheme it. There was a time, however, when things were different with him; when there had been a young wife and a wee baby girl of his own. But they had flitted away together in his youth, and the beautiful old house of his father, which they had made glad, had known innocent joy and reverence no more. During these days in the Carter household with the pretty Blossom Shop beyond his window, and the fragrance and bloom of kindly deed and word dominating the atmosphere about him, those early days had almost come to

seem but yesterday—with the bitterness and sin between all blotted out.

Sitting down beside him, Anne told him all about Donald, and the letters that plowed the ocean. Neither said anything of the date when the wedding was to be: Anne silent from delicacy which forbade the mention of the losses caused by their guest which were responsible for its delay; and the Colonel knowing well that this was the case, for a little town does not fail to reveal the affairs of its well-known inhabitants, and he had good cause to remember this much discussed item. But the bit of confidence between the two, warmed the Colonel's heart, even while remorse stabbed him as it never had before. "If I ever get out of this," he declared inwardly, "and get on my feet again—we will see." And the Colonel had hopes of which he had never spoken

to any one that his affairs might yet straighten out.

Anne wondered at herself when she had left him. "Who would ever have dreamed that I would make a confidant of Colonel Thompson and tell him—of all people in the world—about my love affair?"

But life was teaching her that all things are possible with an unembittered heart.

Colonel Thompson had been quartered in Anne's pretty room, with its pink flowered paper and dainty appointments, about three weeks when she gave him this confidence concerning Donald and the wedding that was to be some day when everything was all right for it, and it had a most unexpected effect upon the injured man. There was something he could do at once, and he was going to do it. He called the doctor in the next day and

asked if he could not be moved to his home on a stretcher. The doctor shook his head at the first suggestion, but a stretcher—it might possibly be managed.

“Are you tired of us?” asked Dr. Murton kindly.

The Colonel turned his head a moment, then with a touch of sternness, he said, “I have not always cared whether I did what I should. I ought to be encouraged when I make a self-evident proposition in the right direction.”

“No one is anxious to see you go, Colonel,” the doctor assured with renewed kindness.

“Thank you,” returned the Colonel. “Will you be so good as to make arrangements for my removal to-morrow?”

“If you wish it, certainly,” replied the doctor.

When the news of his intention was made known, the entire family, with genuine old-time Southern hospitality, urged him to stay till the broken hip was more surely knitted together. Anne joined in with reckless insistence, considering only one necklace was entirely finished, and table supplies were not diminishing any in cost. She had realized to some extent that the clinging to her of the strong man in his hours of suffering and weakness had bound her to him in spite of previous circumstances and that this had been strengthened by her bit of confidence, but she did not know how true the new tie was until she thought of his leaving. Who was there to care for him as they had done? And, oh—would he go back to dreadful words and iron authority? She couldn't bear to think of his doing that! She begged him to stay when the rest had

left the room and she had a moment with him alone.

"I must go," he answered firmly, with new strength in his really fine face, "because it is right that I should. But what has come to me here will not be lost, little girl."

So softly the last was said she hardly heard it, but somehow it made her more reconciled.

Everything was ready for the removal and the men to carry the stretcher standing in the hall, when one of them who had come from the Colonel's place, remembered a letter he had brought over and handed it to Anne as she was going in the Colonel's room with some necessary article for comfort on the trip.

The Colonel, lying in a nervous tension, waiting for the start, took the letter from her and hastily tore it open. His face

blanched with surprise as he grasped its import, and then the color surged from neck to brow as though he had been a young man. He opened his lips, about to exclaim, "I am not going! I shall stay right here!" But a second thought, and the color receded again, while he put his lips tightly together and his clenched hand crushed the letter which it held.

No one noticed this, for all were busy with some detail of preparation, but when he had been carefully moved to the stretcher and steadily borne down the stairs to pause a moment while everybody said good-by to him, Anne caught a gleam in his eye that set her to wondering and which comforted her still further as he was borne away from the house.

"My goodness!" cried Cahaba; "it's just like a funeral!" And tardy repentance of her hardness of heart all the time the

Colonel had been there, together with a superstitious dread of anything like death, sent her feet flying to the rear of the house with an apron-covered head.

There was a subdued feeling in the entire household when the family turned back to go about their several ways, but many things waited to be done—things which had been neglected in the stress of the past weeks, with the injured man to care for and Mrs. Carter under orders. She was quite herself again now, however, and a letter from Mr. Carter promised that he would be there very soon. His letters had been brief, and they did not know what to expect from his trip, but it was good to think he would be with them once more.

As for Anne, she must work on china-berry necklaces every minute now, and she was all enthusiasm since the one she had

finished was so beautiful that Murton Grey had said he would take one for his sweetheart, after all, and Cahaba begged for one for Christmas! If Northern folks proved half so pleased as Southerners who knew all about the "smelly" source from which they had evolved, why she would simply coin money—and maybe there might yet be wedding finery not too far in the distance!

CHAPTER XIV

HAPPINESS DAWNS

MR. CARTER and Willard Griffith on their trip up to the coal and iron region of the mountains of Alabama had talked constantly together, and without knowing how much hinged on a convincing statement of the need of a third man at the plant, on a salary perhaps, Willard had made this point very clear; and furthermore, when they reached the mines and furnace, Mr. Carter could easily see for himself that it was imperatively necessary, if things were to be done in the orderly fashion required for business success.

Then came a battle with himself and his pride. If there was a position open to him here, why should he not take it? But he had never been a hireling! Suppose he had not—in his independent business he had made a serious mistake—he had obligated himself for an amount which he could not meet with justice to himself and his family in his old-time Southern pride which prompted free, open-handedness in dealing with friends, and did not always consider justice and right. Yes, he had seen this error very plainly in the past few months, and now he must go a step farther and recognize that he was not independent any longer; he must take what he could get to do, and accept a pay envelope if it was honestly earned. Reaching this conclusion finally, he held his head high in conscious integrity and turned to the work before him.

At once there was a different quality in his attitude of mind toward the investigation at hand; not that his work was going to be in the least more conscientious with the personal part in possibility for him, but there was the inevitable reaching out for each detail which would be required of him to know, should he take a position there; and, with every incentive alive, he was alert physically and mentally, with a complete transformation in his personal appearance at the end of the trip, which had included a visit East to see the expert who had recently examined the Griffith plant and a looking into the older coal and iron activities in Pennsylvania.

So, about a week after Colonel Thompson had left them, Anne and Gene saw their father's tall figure coming with quick, elastic step up the front walk on the evening of his return, and they did

not need to be told that the trip had been successful.

The household had fallen into dullness after the Colonel left and the two girls were standing on the long front porch, having just come in from a walk and lingered inertly a moment. But taking in the significance of that spirited stride, they turned involuntarily to one another and hugged rapturously, after the manner of girls, then rushed gayly down to meet him and brought him up the steps, one on either side.

The animated trio, with the glad cry of "Father's come," from the happy bodyguards, announced the news to the entire household, and there were glad greetings on every hand. The atmosphere of the house underwent a swift, electrical change, and Murton Grey, who had never taken family changes with any seriousness

of heart, and did not now in the least comprehend what the present illumination of family spirit meant, was yet conscious of the transforming electrical flash and let off some of his answering exuberance by climbing to the low sloping roof of the Blossom Shop porch after supper and jumping off—a thing he had long wanted to do, but hadn't quite dared—then calling to the entire family to come and see him do it—whereupon that part of the celebration was instantly terminated.

The older folks at last settled down to hear of the business side of the trip, having listened during supper to an interesting account of mountain conditions in general, as seen from Mr. Carter's point of view, while from their side came the interesting and amazing story of how Colonel Thompson had been thrown helpless at their very door almost, and more amaz-

ing still, how they had all become very fond of him, which story had only been given him very meagerly by letter. Mr. Carter listened with palpable constraint, it being impossible for him, without contact with the suffering and helpless Colonel, which had been their portion, to feel any appreciable change of heart, and the story lost much of its warmth under his constrained listening. Dr. Murton who was still there, waiting somewhat impatiently for the outcome of this trip, soon switched the conversation back to the mountain interest, however, and Mr. Carter dropped his constraint while he told them that he considered the outlook of the Griffith mining and pig iron furnace venture most promising; he liked the two young men exceedingly; they were gentlemanly, strictly upright, and had a good grasp of the technicalities of the business,

which, combined with energy, ought to bring success—provided their capital could be increased. This was sorely needed, and an additional man, for they could not well handle the financial as well as the more active side of the work.

The spirits of the entire family rose to new heights at this, for all felt that the matter was practically settled; Mr. Carter would go into the business with the Griffith boys, as they called them, while Aunt Martha and Gene furnished new capital, and—Professor Vernon's land could be bought, Anne and Gene exclaimed joyfully to each other while May's eyes revealed her pleasure. All this was in truth the outcome. In fact Mr. Carter went the following morning at once to the work of arranging business details, and for the next few days was busily engaged straightening out his af-

fairs preparatory to closing the office in the little town which he had held so long.

Following a law that good fortune as well as evil, has a way of fluttering in upon us in flocks, on one of these days, as Mr. Carter sat in the morning at his desk looking over papers, a messenger came in with a note. Opening it he found Colonel Thompson's signature. There was instant tightening of his lips; but he read it through, supposing it to be possibly a note of thanks—the old reprobate would be decent enough for that he supposed—though none of his thanks were wanted. The note was exceedingly brief, however, only one line, in fact, simply requesting that Mr. Carter would call at once upon the writer, if possible to do so.

To the tightened lips were added a distinct frown between Mr. Carter's stern

eyes. This was too much—to be asked to go and hear the man's weak palaver about what had been done for him from the most elemental humanitarian motive on the part of the Carter household. He turned to the messenger—a tall, black negro:

“Tell the Colonel, please, that it is impossible for me to go to him; I am exceedingly busy with matters of great importance.”

The negro looked instant alarm. “Boss,” he said, “I was to bring yer, an’ I got the rig outside waiting.”

“Can’t help that,” said Mr. Carter, firmly.

“Look here, marster—” the darkey’s voice was almost pleading, “he said he just had ter see yer—an’ I tell yer he’s a new man sense he got that hurt—an’ he said he would not keep you a minute.”

This was a decided exaggeration, but no matter.

It so happened that Anne and Gene walked in the office just in time to hear this bit of conversation and the impulsive Anne at this point put her arms about her father's neck. "Do go, father," she pleaded in a whisper.

He was on the point of putting her arms off and refusing with final energy, but a bit of moisture in the earnest young eyes turned the scale, and with firm-set lips he put on his hat and went with the waiting darkey.

Anne and Gene watched them start off with great interest and sat down to take care of the office till his return.

"Oh, I am so glad," cried Anne as soon as she could, "for now they will certainly make friends as the rest of us have—and I don't want ever again to come as near

hating anybody as we did the Colonel, so long as I live! How much happier we all are now that we love him instead! That sounds awful 'good,' I know, but it is true," she ended with a laugh.

Gene laughed in turn, "I confess I don't love him as much as you do, Anne—you always do things on the wholesale plan, you know—but I don't hate him any more, as you say, and I am so happy about everything since father is going into business up in the mountains and let me furnish some of the capital, that I can be glad, too, that he has gone to see the Colonel—and maybe—who knows? He may have something nice to tell father,—may have some money or something?"

Gene was indeed growing very optimistic, and they had all come to know that she had a bit of psychic intuition, not unusual in those who have known blindness.

Anne laughed back and said teasingly: "You are always seeing promising little yellow boys and girls climbing the sunset bars, like Emily Dickinson's little poem you were brought up on, you know. I don't ever expect anything from the Colonel, but I do want all of us to stop hating him."

Meantime Mr. Carter was making his way to the Colonel's home, a mile from town below the Carter place.

He was ushered into an old-fashioned, well-furnished but poorly kept room where the Colonel lay on his bed, and the fine face lit up at Mr. Carter's approach in a way that was hard to resist, especially for a man with a fresh reënforcement of hope and courage as he greeted one stricken with helplessness.

They clasped hands with a touch of cordiality.

"You were very good indeed to come to me," began the Colonel warmly; "I am afraid I would not have been so generous in your place." Then he hurried on to prevent any constraint: "I have such good news that I had to see you at once when I heard of your return. It came to me, like all other good things, under your roof—just as I was on the point of leaving," he smiled in pleased recollection, "and I confess that I was almost weak enough to send the boys and the stretcher away and stay there! But I knew I had not the right if I could pay for it a thousand times over—which you and your folks would never let me do—and I was able to go, so I pulled myself together and came home, as I should."

Then, with fresh energy: "Not to waste a moment of your time, Mr. Carter, I will proceed to the business in hand,

and say at once that my affairs have taken a sudden turn and I am quite prepared to refund the amount you—er—advanced to me, in full, with ten per cent interest.”

Mr. Carter, amazed as he had never been in his life before, had not passed through the mill of misfortune and struggle the past few months for naught, and he bowed his head with fine control.

After a moment's pause the Colonel began again. “Once I would not have cared a—well, I won't say it—what you thought of me, but that little Anne of yours—well, she has changed things for me. It began before my hurt, when she met me always with unfailing smiles. That was hard to stand—I knew about her delayed wedding, too—and I made up my mind then, if ever I was able, you should have back every penny that you had lost

through me! I cannot talk about all that has happened since," he ended, and turned his head away as he said it.

Going back again to direct speech, he went on: "Now I want you to know that I greatly deplore your being involved in my affairs, and it was wholly unexpected to me. I had put practically everything I had in a Western venture about which this little town knew nothing. It promised immediate and large returns, but there was a hitch—I had to meet that note—and for a time it looked as though everything had gone to pieces. The little I retained was absolutely necessary for the care of my helpless sister. But a few weeks ago I began to be more hopeful, and the day I left your house came a letter with full assurance of success. I am prepared now, as I say, to return every penny of yours with interest, and I hope

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you will believe me when I say that nothing could make me happier."

Mr. Carter extended his hand and the two men gripped one another.

"Colonel, you should have told me this at the time. I would have felt very differently toward you."

"Infernal pride," replied the Colonel grimly, "and I confess that the fact I had wronged you made me hate you so—strange phenomenon that, but it is true—that I doubt if I had ever returned a cent to you if it had not been for those smiles of your Anne which had made me determine before the hurt to do so. She is a rare girl, Mr. Carter."

When he returned to the waiting girls at the office, Mr. Carter made no report of his visit to them, for he felt that he must tell his wife first; but Anne looked

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wonderingly at something new she saw in his face, and said happily to Gene on the way home: "I am sure everything went well between father and the Colonel, though father never said a word."

It was afternoon before her father took her alone to the library and made the happy revelation. The story was too transcendently beautiful for words! Anne could not take in all its outreaching possibilities at once. While she waited breathlessly, her father went on with a very tender accent:

"The Colonel says, Anne, that your smiles and bright greetings to him did the work even before the accident—and, knowing about the postponed wedding, too, made them all the more effective."

A moment of high happiness and he added:

"That speech of Colonel Thompson's

was worth more to me than the money, daughter, not only because I was proud of you for the lovely spirit you have shown of self-sacrifice, and good cheer to everybody, not even excepting our 'enemy,' but because it was worth much to me as a vindication of your mother's theory that resentment does not pay, on the negative side, and that kindness does—even in return for evil—on the positive side, which is a hard lesson for men to learn."

Then he put an arm about her and said, "Those wedding plans can go right forward now, daughter. I am in a position to arrange everything."

A happier girl than Anne never trod the earth, as she drank in this warm appreciation, and realized that plans for her marriage could be immediately begun.

"I never saw anything so fruitful as

pine needles, china-berries, and chinca-pins," she declared gayly to her mother, Aunt Martha and Gene as they talked about it together a little later. "You only just have to think about them, seeing them transformed into charming baskets and necklaces and gold coin in your mind's eye, when lo! a second transformation takes place immediately, and there are silks and satins—and crowns!"

Anne's clear soprano promptly returned to glorias with new high notes of joy, and such happy times they had planning all the wedding details, again, with great merriment over Cahaba's crowns, which were always a vital part of it now. But this, of course, was after Anne's letter had gone to Donald, setting the new wedding date for Thanksgiving! Then, while they planned, she followed that happy letter over every bounding ocean

wave till it lay in his hand on the other side. How she ever waited for his reply is a mystery to the household to this good day. Uncle Doctor had great fun over the progress of both letters till he, Aunt Martha and Gene left for the East; the doctor and Gene to look after some matters concerning Gene's sanatorium for blind children, and Aunt Martha to attend to household things. Then she and Gene would join Mrs. Carter and Anne in New York a little later for that much delayed shopping.

Cahaba was quite alive to the changes going on in the household, and, one morning, Mandy, her mother, was in her old place as cook, without leave or bidding, the housemaid who had served them was at the door ready to take her place again, and Cahaba, herself, became chief functionary of many things as of old, while

visions grew daily for herself and her hearers, of how she would cross the ocean as Miss Anne's maid, and see the wonderful things that she longed, with her alert mentality, to see. Life would never be dull for Cahaba; she was preëminently resourceful, and grasped every visible and invisible opportunity that came her way.

May must be written to, and Anne claimed this joyful task. When she told about Colonel Thompson's restoration of everything their father had lost through him, she added, "It was smiling greetings that did it mostly, May," not specifying that the effective ones were declared to be from Anne, herself, "and mother is proven right again, as she usually is.

"Now," the letter went on, "the wedding is to be Thanksgiving—isn't that appropriate?—that you may come to be my maid of honor; and I want you to bring

that delightful Professor Addison Humphrey Vernon as one of our groomsmen. Donald and I settled that long ago when I wrote and told him how fine the professor is. Donald will write him, of course, but I thought you might prepare the way. Another groomsman is to be that splendid Willard Griffith that Gene found in the mountains, you know, who is father's partner now. He has been here, we were all delighted with him and I think Gene likes him better than anybody she knows. Then the third will be his brother George, and with Murton Grey these are all I want. You know I have always promised Murton Grey that if he could find a sweetheart he might be one of our attendants and he declares he has found one!"

May wrote back, happy over all the good news Anne's letter held, and espe-

cially that the wedding was so near a reality. "As for President Vernon, however," she wrote, "I see no more of him than would the merest atom in the universe! We are at faculty meetings together, of course, as during last year, but aside from that I simply get bows from him in passing across the campus, and possibly a bright remark on that exciting subject, the weather! Fortunately, I do not care to see more of him, however."

At this Anne laughed ringingly. She was indeed a remarkable expert in affairs of the heart, just now.

"That was the way it was with Donald and me for a long time, once," she declared to herself. "He hardly saw me when he passed,—and I didn't want him to, oh, no! Professor Vernon is avoiding May because he, an unmarried principal,

must be very discreet—and *she* doesn't want any notice from *him!*"

Anne told her mother about this part of May's letter with her interpretation, and Mrs. Carter replied lovingly, "Oh, Anne, the world is all a budding or blossoming romance for you, now."

"I guess so," agreed Anne happily, "but don't you think Professor Vernon is nice and that he and May will fall in love?"

"The first part I will agree to—Professor Vernon is very nice, as you say, indeed, but as to the latter part, whether he and May will fall in love, I could not venture to say. Love is a thing about which there is no prophesying."

Anne looked positively disappointed for a fleeting moment, then smiling, she said philosophically, "Well, I've set her the example I should, as older sister, anyway."

Before the trip North for her "finery," as Anne always put it, she went to see the Colonel. Not that this was her first visit—she had been several times to see him since he left them—but this was a visit of rare joy. As she went in, her face aglow with happiness and charm, she cried:

"Colonel, I've come to tell you all about my wedding finery that is to be!"

"Good!" he answered, reaching out both hands to her with all the enthusiasm she could have asked.

Then she sat down beside him and they talked over that wedding gown, of what it was to be evolved, how long the train was to sweep the floor behind her, how the wedding veil was to be draped and all such beautiful and thrilling points. It was hard to tell which of the two was most interested. After all the years of starving for touch with the sweeter things of

life, the Colonel seemed hungry for all he could get in the feast which had been spread before him since his contact with the Carters.

When they were through and Anne was leaving with many good wishes for the success of her trip, she said, smiling as he held fast to one hand in the warmth of his good-by, and she shook a finger of the other emphatically, "Now, you are going to get well enough to come—mind, these are my last orders and must be obeyed!"

"I'll be there, if I have to be brought back on a stretcher," he assured her.

"No, I won't have that," she laughed again; "you must come in state this time, riding in a carriage!"

"Just as you say," he returned.

Then they were aboard the train for New York going after that most fasci-

nating thing in a woman's life, her wedding trousseau, with trees and houses flitting by in gay "How d'ye do," and "We wish you well," as they rushed past.

CHAPTER XV

A BLOSSOM SHOP WEDDING

“MOTHER, I don’t see why joy doesn’t kill people,” said Anne, some three weeks later, with a touch of awe in her voice.

The shopping was over, the wedding raiment, carefully protected, hung in closets or lay in trunks and dresser drawers, and the crowns glistened in imaginative splendor about the middle of November.

But it was the May-time of Anne’s life, and each day came the unconscious “Call me early, mother dear,” of her heart that

she might drink in every precious bit of inner sunshine and bloom. They could not come fast enough—these glorious days—for each one brought Donald nearer! The letters had ceased their surging back and forth over the big waters of separation, for the lover himself had boarded an ocean liner, and each foam-flecked wave was bringing him nearer and nearer.

Then he had landed in New York and slow-moving messengers were cast to the four winds of heaven. A telegram sped on hidden rays of light to announce to Anne his safe arrival. Still another, two days later, came flashing in with the tidings that a couple of hours more would bring him to her side! It was then that Anne wondered joy did not kill!

She was so much alive, however, and so scintillating when he was really there,

that it is all quite beyond description in ordinary prose style. Cahaba, with her ready tongue and dramatic style, could alone do it justice.

She found an audience in the rear yard late that night, through the gathering in of all the neighboring cooks and housemaids, while she regaled them with the splendors of the young Englishman's first evening in the home of his affianced bride.

"You should have seen him walk into the dining-room for supper. Here's the way he come," translating description into action with a regal gait. Then returning to description: "His head was high, and his light, waving hair stood up in front just like it was reaching for its crown—course he wouldn't wear it here, for we don't have crowns in this country—but his hair was standing up, showing how used it is to 'em,—and he that tall and splendid

and smiling you can't think of anything *but* kings and princes!"

Cahaba never could get away from royalty.

The audience was breathlessly impressed, and, hurrying on, she next portrayed Anne. "But, I tell you, Miss Anne ain't one speck behind him, though. She was like a queen to-night, if ever you saw one" (precarious contingency); "she was dressed in a pink organdy, that just floated around her and trailed off on the floor like a rosy cloud"; and Cahaba's lithe, dusky figure paraded about the rear yard in the moonlight with a long, imaginary train in moving picture realism.

Stopping again, the tale went on: "Her hair was done up so stylish you would think her head had just stepped out of one of these fashion plates right onto

her lovely shoulders; and her face, why, it jes' fairly hurt your eyes, it was so shining! Em-e-m—e-e-m,” in a sort of rapturous whining, “you jes' ought to seen *him* look at her! His eyes was jes' *glued* to her, you could see that, but he was so polite and grand that he kep' talking to and pretending to look at her mother. It's my opinion though, that he did it because, looking at her sitting at the head of the table, he could see Miss Anne setting beside her, for he ain't only human, of course!

“Then he talked to the doctor some, and to Mr. Carter and Miss Martha, 'cause quality has to remember they *are* quality, sweetheart or no sweetheart,—and he was too gracious and elegant for anything!” Here the reproduction of the guest's elegantly bowing head and gesticulating hands made the picture most realistic, if

astonishing, could the original have witnessed it.

To follow Anne and Donald visually the day after his arrival would be to catch glimpses of the erect figure of Cahaba's description in vigorous yet easy carriage, his ready arm touching hers as they mounted steps or passed through gates, his look bent upon her, his young laugh ringing out now and then, while her gray-blue eyes sparkled with the spring gleam of life, her white skirts fluttered in the November wind and her light feet tripped joyously beside him from one familiar spot to another: among the shrubs and flowers, on to the Blossom Shop and on still to the little strip of woods with its swift-running stream which had been the fairy playground of their youth; to Mammy Sue's cabin for greeting and a word about Uncle Sam with a proud ac-

count of his imposing funeral; and then to the house again, and to the parlor, that he might hear her sing after the long separation and acclaim maturity of certain high soprano notes from recent practice of those glorias. And through it all there was, of course, the sweet communion of youth and love, the tracing of many invisible paths which had led to the present happy fulfillment; paths which, to be sure, had all been traversed by letter, but which must now be retraced in more realistic speech.

Finally, resting at last upon the low parlor window seat, facing one another and the autumn scene without, Anne, with smiling enthusiasm, summed up this reviewing of the past few months of hope and discouragement, effort and fruition, with:

“I think it is perfectly wonderful about

this wedding and wedding party of ours! First we were making beautiful plans for ourselves, but in a commonplace way, and lo! there was sudden black calamity and no wedding possible, with May sorrowfully on the road home from school! Then, on the train with her was the funny little old French woman who just laid hold of Professor Vernon—figuratively speaking—and brought him into our wedding party. Next, there was the big tottering iron furnace sending out a possible last brilliant ‘run’ which brought in Willard and George Griffith—and you will like all three of these men immensely, I am sure. The wedding finery for the dim future was coming slowly along by the pine needle, china-berry, chincapin and flower route, when it was suddenly overtaken by some smiles and a dreadful accident which ushered in good things for

Colonel Thompson and father—and brought to us finery and wedding, all in sudden, happy whirlwind—and perhaps some of the bills will finally be paid by iron ore dug from the far interior of the earth!”

“Well, don’t you know,” said Donald, bending his kindling gaze upon her, “that the most precious and costly thing in the world, the diamond, is dug from the earth with great processes of skill and labor—and—” the rest was unspoken, but Anne was able to translate a comparison too gleaming for speech.

“Oh, it is an infinitely happier wedding than it would have been as first planned,” the girl said softly at last, turning with mist-dimmed eyes to the quiet scene without. “Waiting proves to be a wonderful thing sometimes—if we just remember that it may, and be happy and

busy while we wait. We might have had others for our bridal party, of course,—young men we have grown up with and like—but the past few months have broadened our horizon in a surprising way, making life seem to mean more to us than ever before, and Professor Vernon and the Griffiths have had part in our struggle, they touched our lives in the thick of battle, and mean so much more to us.”

“That is all true, and everything has turned out as happily as possible—but, battle in a Blossom Shop, Anne, what an incongruity!” laughed Donald from the glad security of the present.

“Yes,” returned Anne, sudden wonder in her eyes, “so it is,—yet the world is full of flowers everywhere and they do not prevent war, so there must be battles—for the right even in Blossom Shops, I suppose.”

"We must try to remember that when we set up ours in old England," said Donald in turn with a quick touch of seriousness—all in the flicker of grave and gay which marks young joy.

Then, going still from one point of interest to another, Anne laughingly told him of Cahaba's imaginings concerning them to which she had listened some months before.

"Why, Donald, do you know, Cahaba has gotten every negro in this town to believing that you and I are to sit on thrones in England, and wear crowns every day!"

Donald laughed in his hearty English way. "She's the same Cahaba I remember so jolly well! Education has not toned her down. I was afraid it would, and she's too delicious to be spoiled!"

"See here, Anne," he said, turning to her with sudden and unforestalled in-

spiration, as he thought, "can't we take her with us? You will need a maid!"

Anne laughed in return. "That is just what she wants us to do! In fact she has been counting on it as a certainty, but I would not write you for I thought we could better talk it over, and I have never encouraged her in the least. She would make an excellent one, however, for she has natural gifts that would fit her well for the place."

"Why, certainly she must go; we will settle that at once!"

"Are you sure she will be acceptable to the other servants, Donald? I don't want your consideration for me, nor your partiality for Cahaba," she laughingly added, "to bias your judgment."

"That will be absolutely all right in England. The others will enjoy her—and they do not feel about colored people

as we do here. Then, think what an asset she will be as a booster! With her to keep our aspirations up—crowns always in view—I will be in Parliament, at least, by the end of a year!”

“Oh, would you like to be there—ever?” Anne asked wistfully—at a quick, haunting thought of how life might take him from her, with its myriad activities.

Donald was silent a moment. “I think I would—and with you to help me I shall try to be all that my mother dreamed for me,” he ended, with swift appeal in the eyes he bent upon her.

Anne’s vision suddenly opened to the highest possibilities of her wifehood, and the vow of a true helpmate was softly registered in her heart.

To win Murton Grey was a distinct task for the prospective brother-in-law. Unlike Cahaba, there was no capacity in

which he could go along with Anne—and considering every point of view, it was not entirely desirable—unless father and mother, May and Gene, could go along too, though this drawback was, of course, not made public. It was simply a little tether for the heart which holds boys invisibly from many things. How good comradeship could ever have been established between the two without Donald's fine dog kennels—in which his faithful boyhood friend, old Rex, was king—combined with fascinating tales of England and the dogs in the hunting season, it is hard to say. But it was successfully accomplished with these accessories, and a visit to the kennels was thereafter the goal of the boy's desires.

The date of the wedding came on apace, with busy preparations filling each day and tender hearts watching the bride-to-be

as she flitted about helpfully till the last moment.

May and Professor Addison Humphrey Vernon came in on the same train, having left the moment Thanksgiving holidays began at Addison College. The professor, with the smiling corner of his mouth entirely conquering the unsmiling, seemed very courteous and attentive, to the observing Anne, as the two arrived,—quite as though he might have been traveling with something more than “the merest atom in the universe.”

Mr. Carter, with Willard and George Griffith, arrived on the last train before the ceremony, for they could not afford much time from the affairs of the furnace, and it was astonishing to see the increased vigor and alertness in every move of Mr. Carter, while the Messrs. Griffith delighted all with their ready courtesy and

frank, fine faces. Uncle Doctor, Aunt Martha and Gene, already arrived, were in the group who met them at the door, and Anne did not fail to note also the quick flush on Gene's delicate cheek as she greeted Willard Griffith, nor the light in his eye as he responded.

"Mother, did you notice?" she whispered at the first opportunity, and the mother replied from her maturer experience again:

"Ah, Anne—romance expert—there's never any telling about these things!"

Then the wedding was at hand with chrysanthemums in their glory, no heavy frost having as yet fallen and myriads of the white blossoms made fragrant altar offering, while rose vines, still in abundant leaf climbing the porch roof were intertwined at the last moment with chrysanthemums of all colors, making a cover-

let which the fairies might have woven in preparation of the Blossom Shop marriage chapel—for here the weddings of the family must always be, had long been positively settled—and that Anne's was distinctly a floral wedding, goes without saying.

Mammy Sue's trembling old fingers pinned on the bridal veil which had been Anne's mother's, while the sweet picture of that mother who had slipped away in her youth hung in its accustomed place about the girl's neck; and the bit of blue, which the bride must wear, was a tiny china-berry blue-colored bead in the center of each rosette on her white satin slippers!

Around Anne's throat was a string of exquisitely matched pearls, the gift of Colonel Thompson. Donald said he was almost jealous of them, but Anne replied:

"They will always be to me a symbol of the most beautiful thing in the world, Donald,—Love. Love instead of hate! Love to everybody, including our enemies, as a ruling motive in life. These beautiful pearls from Colonel Thompson will never let me forget it."

She had said the same to her father as his lips tightened when the pearls were first held up for him to see, and his head began an emphatic denial of Colonel Thompson's right to make such a gift. An appealing look from Mrs. Carter reinforced Anne's declaration and he restrained himself till the words, "Love instead of hate," coming again and again to his mind, swept away the last of his resentful pride.

Of course Colonel Thompson was there for the ceremony, immaculately dressed in wedding garb, though in a wheel chair,

as this seemed safest and best for his injured hip.

Anne's gleaming white gown—well, it really doesn't matter much about that—Cahaba might describe it if she were not so busy helping everywhere, and packing her trunk between times for the voyage with Miss Anne; and as for the groom, he was even sufficiently fine and distinguished-looking to match Cahaba's previous powers of portrayal.

The little couple, Murton Grey and his small sweetheart in brave wedding finery, led the bridal procession, strewing flowers from beautiful baskets as they went.

There were three lovely bride's maids; May and Gene and Margaret Larson, a girlhood friend of Anne's who had moved away but who came happily back for the wedding of Anne and Donald; and, in the final pairing off, lovely Margaret with

her fairest of skin and auburn hair, was assigned to Professor Addison Humphrey Vernon, May to Willard Griffith and Gene to the fine young George Griffith with his flaming "sorrel top," as he called it. And it seemed a beautiful arrangement, fitting into the color scheme with rare harmony and helping to make the wedding scene a beautiful whole—but, as to whether this was a prophetic pairing off or no, it is impossible to determine, for certainty, as Mrs. Carter had discovered, life has a way of her own in conducting affairs of the heart.

A sacred moment hovered over the Blossom Shop once more—and Anne Carter and Donald Thornton stepped out thereafter with the old tie, which God had joined and man must not put asunder, binding their hearts and lives.

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